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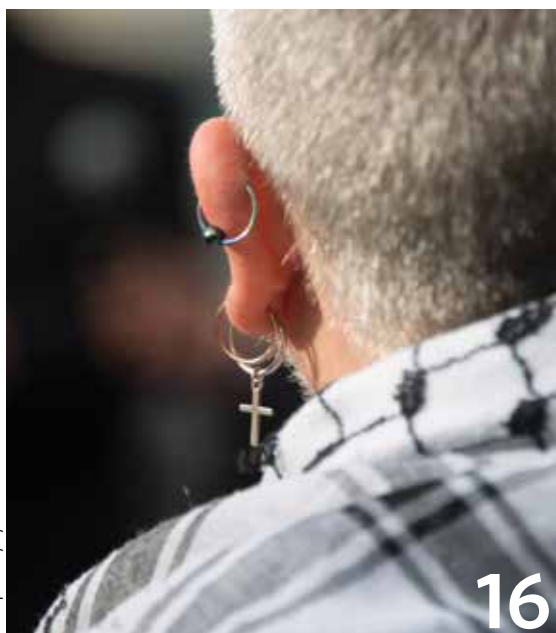
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16



20



26

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contents

MARCH 2015 Vol. 44 | No. 3

COVER

16 Pro-Israeli, Pro-Palestinian, Pro-Jesus

Evangelicals no longer automatically take a one-sided approach to conflict in the Middle East.

by Ryan Rodrick Beiler

FEATURES

20 A Farm Grows in Brookland

Gail Taylor nurtures crops and faith in the middle of D.C.

by Kimberly Burge

26 Quit Picking on the Pharisees!

Is Christian criticism of the Pharisees anti-Semitic?

by Amy-Jill Levine

30 The Cost of Discipleship

At times, confronting racism means angering the pews.

by Erin E. Tocknell

34 The Old Man and the C-Note

102-year-old liberation economist Arturo Paoli comes in from the cold—thanks to Pope Francis.

by Mark V. Ewert

CULTURE WATCH

40 Were You There? Racism and the arts.

Reviews: *Francis of Rome* and *Francis of Assisi*; *Doing Good Without Giving Up*; Marilynne Robinson's *Lila*

42 Eyes & Ears, by Danny Duncan Collum

43 On Film, by Gareth Higgins

COMMENTARY

8 Money and politics

9 Nuns and the Vatican

10 Iraqi refugees

DEPARTMENTS

5 Letters

25 Poetry

47 Short Takes

48 Living the Word

by Jason Byassee

COLUMNS

7 Hearts & Minds

by Jim Wallis

12 Moving Mountains

by Lisa Sharon Harper

14 Grain of Salt

by Jim Rice

24 Deep Economy

by Bill McKibben

50 H'rumpths

by Ed Spivey Jr.

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ONE OF THE barriers to a just peace in the Middle East has been the one-sided stance of some evangelical Christians in the United States. Many conservative Christians have been uncritical of even the most repressive Israeli policies and political opponents of a responsible two-state solution. But this seems to be changing.

Ryan Rodrick Beiler has covered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for more than a decade—including a four-year assignment in Palestine with a humanitarian organization—and has discovered seven reasons why many U.S. evangelicals are having a change of heart. For one, they've started to listen to the voices

of Palestinian Christians and are rethinking the flawed theological underpinnings of a mindset that links the "chosen people" of God exclusively with the modern nation-state of Israel. Young evangelicals in particular are becoming more aware of the injustices that pervade Israel's relationship with Palestinians.

A traditional evangelical rationalization for conflict in Palestine has been that there will never be peace in the Middle East until Jesus comes again. Now some are saying that instead of waiting for divine intervention, the faithful response is to get active in the pursuit of a just peace for all God's children in the region.

Also in this issue, Erin Tocknell writes that when pastors and seminary students worked for civil rights in 1964 Nashville, their harshest critics were often their own church congregations. Gail Taylor's long-term commitment to Washington, D.C.'s inner city took on an unexpected twist after volunteering at a farm in Maryland. She planted what has turned into a two-acre farm in the middle of the nation's capital, a place much in need of fertilization. And finally, we introduce a man who we imagine will be the "new kid on the block" for many readers: 102-year-old Arturo Paoli, a Catholic priest and the most important economist you've never heard of. ■

Letters

FOSTERING CONVERSATION

Thank you for David Gushee's thoughts about sexuality in January 2015's "Tackling the Hard Questions" and "Disputable Matters." His articles are refreshingly honest and humble, even while speaking truth. I appreciate the references to authors writing about the conversation between pastoral reality and scriptural interpretation. Both need to be taken seriously, and these articles do that. I feel more empowered in my own context to share this with colleagues and leaders.

Melanie Weldon-Soiset
Shanghai, China

SPIRIT AS GUIDE

In David Gushee's articles about gays, lesbians, and the church (January 2015), there is a missing voice. We are privileged to know many Christians who believe that refraining from acting upon their same-sex attraction is part of the "living sacrifice" they offer to God. No theological argument brought them to that decision—simply the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit. As the church moves beyond condemnation of gays and lesbians, there are tough issues of conscience and submission to God to resolve. It's not a one-size-fits-all proposition. And that necessarily complicates the lives of all Christians—gay or not.

Other forms of sexual brokenness are omitted from the conversation. The church often reflects the non-Christian world with

"Gushee's articles are refreshingly honest and humble, even while speaking truth."

its high divorce rate, extramarital affairs, homophobia, and image consciousness. 1 John 1:8-9 says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves ... If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us." Sacramental confession, mercy, purification, and the Holy Spirit's discerning voice are essential to this conversation about same-sex attraction and gay marriage. We are flawed people with an opportunity to take the lead in providing a safe, loving space for that conversation.

James and Marte Riley
Vista, California

WISDOM AND IMPERFECTION

Although I appreciated David Gushee's articles in the January issue, I think a simpler way to deal with the biblical perspective on LGBT issues is to drop concepts such as "infallibility," "inerrancy," and perhaps even "inspiration" and "authority." Rather than writing articles that attempt to explain away the biblical stance, it seems more logical and essentially effortless to regard the Bible as written by humans of a different era—perhaps less enlightened and just as prone to error—who got it wrong. Seeing the Bible

from the perspective of an infallible rule-book or playbook detracts from its essential wisdom and beauty.

Marvin De Jong
Ozark, Missouri

LIVING THE WORD

There's always so much I love and learn from in *Sojourners*. I often feel immense gratitude and appreciation for the thoughtful, thought-provoking pieces. However, there's something I missed in the January issue: Min-Ah Cho's excellent "Living the Word" reflections. I loved reading her commentaries and analyses, which rang true in ways that inspired me to discover a new and more meaningful call to both Bible reading and activism.

Elizabeth Claman
Richmond, California

CORRECTION

In our January 2015 issue, we misidentified the nationality of Thomas Merton's father and godfather. Both were from New Zealand.

Your name here! Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, *Sojourners*, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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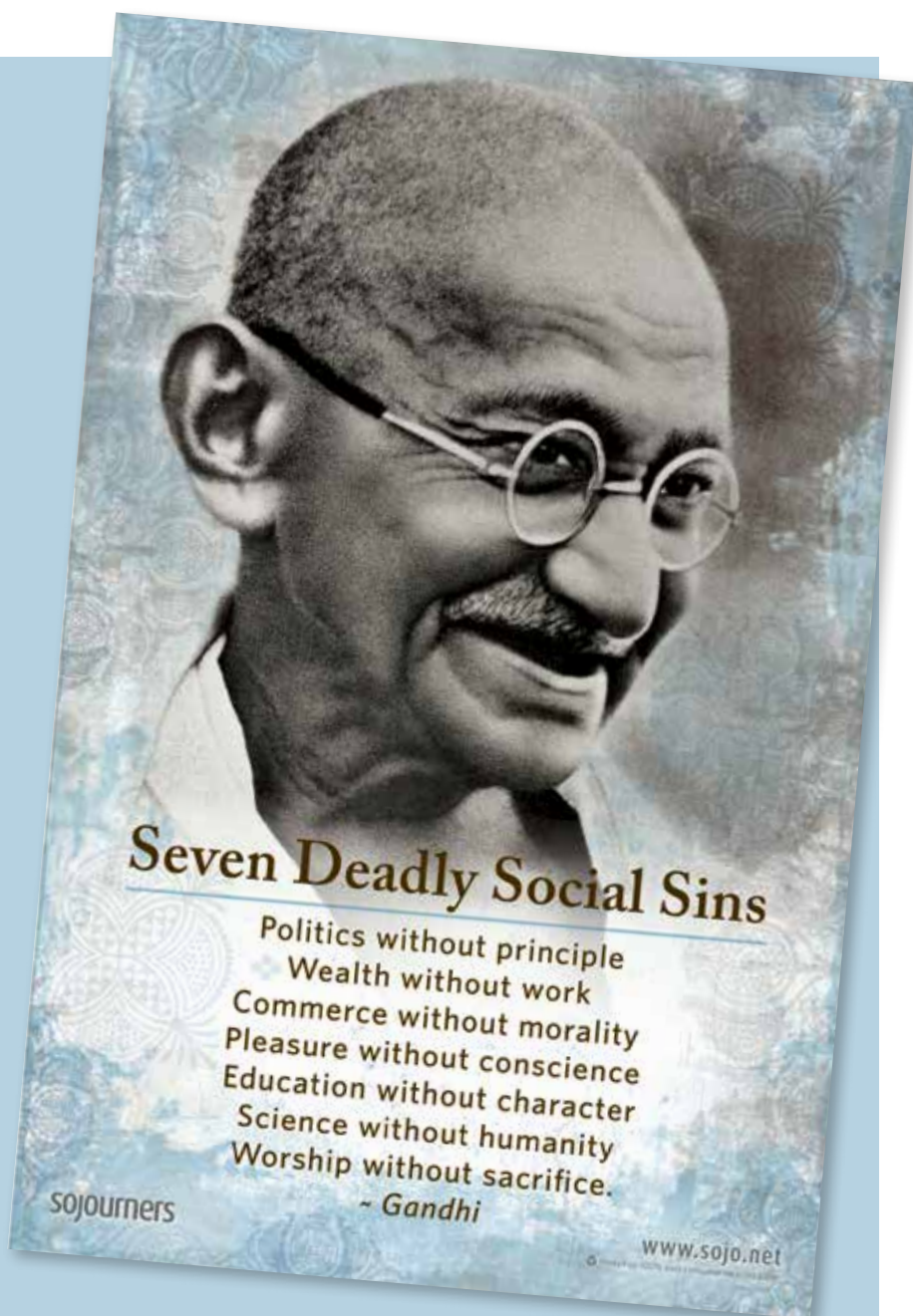
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BY JIM WALLIS

Choosing the Side of Justice



THE ISRAELI/PALESTINIAN conflict has claimed countless lives, caused unimaginable trauma, and devastated families and communities for decades. As Christians, we should lament this ongoing tragedy and commit ourselves to the cause of peace. However, we must also confess to and repent of the fact that American Christians have often been an obstacle to peace in the region.

On one side of the conflict, many evangelicals have historically been uncritical supporters of Israel. This support often stems from dispensationalism—the belief that a Jewish state must exist in the Middle East in order for Christ to return. Because the continued existence and thriving of the Israeli state is viewed by these Christian Zionists as nothing less

Furthermore, when Israel's critics downplay or fail to acknowledge Israel's very real security concerns, it diminishes the validity of their critique of Israel's actions.

Yet while Christians on both sides of the Israel/Palestine issue have often taken positions that impede progress toward peace in the region, there are also hopeful examples of a more honest and fair approach being taken by both evangelicals and mainline Protestants. Many young evangelicals are rejecting the message of Christian Zionism, dwelling less on the afterlife and the end times and focusing more on making the reign of God a reality on earth “as it is in heaven” by pursuing social justice and seeking to be the “peacemakers” that Jesus called us to be. As such, they are more sensitive to the plight of the ordinary Palestinians and Israelis who have suffered so much at the hands of their failed leaders and the most radical elements of their respective societies. And many mainline Protestants are also taking a much more nuanced position on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. They are recognizing Israel's right to exist and its security concerns, while still offering a prophetic challenge to unjust Israeli policies and actions.

In approaching the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, I believe that as Christians we are called to be both *honest* and *fair*, rather than being *balanced* or *neutral* in our witness. But what does a more honest and fair perspective look like? First, we need to reject the distortions propagated by elements at both extremes of the conflict. And then we need to look at the situation with clear eyes and speak the truth in love, no matter how hard it is to do.

One of those truths is the fact that Israeli settlements in the West Bank are perhaps the largest obstacle to a lasting peace in the region. These

are aggressive forays into Palestinian territory, and their presence looms over the chances for peace in the Middle East, just as the ultramodern hilltop settlements themselves loom over the poor Palestinian villages in the valleys below them.

Another truth is that there is indeed Palestinian violence against Israelis. Shootings, suicide bombings, and rocket attacks have been carried out by terrorists against Israeli civilians. The existence of horrific violence against innocent Israelis cannot be disputed. And such violence can *never* be justified.

But if we are to be honest and fair, we need to speak clearly to the balance of power in this conflict. There is no “symmetry” in the violence of the Middle East today. It is simply an undeniable fact that the overwhelming power is on the Israeli side and the majority of victims are on the Palestinian side. The Israelis respond to the tragic deaths of their civilians at the hands of terrorists by shelling Palestinians in massive, disproportionate retaliation. The casualties are enormous, and the majority of them are civilians. Violence against civilians is a definition of terrorism, and it must be named and condemned on all sides.

For American Christians, to truly promote peace in the region, we need to pursue an approach that is pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, and pro-peace. We must support the hopes, aspirations, safety, and desire to live in peace of people on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides of the conflict. And we can and must do so without ignoring the facts on the ground or the balance of power. Only then can we really become the peacemakers Christ wants us to be—in this conflict and so many others. ■

There is no “symmetry” in the violence of the Middle East today.

than God's will, they have historically been unwilling to criticize or even question Israel's behavior. This reflexive and one-sided support for the Israeli government and military has made it much more difficult for the U.S. to be considered an honest broker in the peace process.

In contrast to evangelicals, some mainline Protestants and other liberal Christians have also been a problem to peace by taking an unrelentingly negative attitude toward Israel. Some Christians from this camp have gone so far as to argue that the premise upon which the modern state of Israel was founded is unjust and illegitimate. Given the present reality of Israel's existence—not to mention the horrors of the Holocaust—coming to the table with that position is not helpful to having a productive conversation about creating peace in the region.

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

People Surge



#DearPope

Typhoon Haiyan survivors demonstrate at a refugee shelter in the storm-devastated province of Leyte, Philippines, to call Pope Francis' attention to their possible transfer to another temporary shelter. As part of the People Surge popular movement, hurricane survivors sent letters to the pope ahead of his January visit. "When the poor raise their voices to cry for justice and peace," they wrote, "the rich and powerful rulers are offended by our sound and continue to oppress us." In Leyte, Pope Francis responded, "I'm here to be with you. A little late, I have to say, but I am here."

By Ben Cohen

Turning Money Into Media

Ben & Jerry's cofounder on how to fight back against big money in politics.

AS ICE CREAM entrepreneurs, Jerry and I have been on a journey that has led us squarely to the conclusion that, while there are many ways that a business can use its power to improve people's quality of life, the most effective lever for economic and social justice is the government.

Business can use its voice to influence government for good. But too often big corporations use the system of unlimited political "donations"—a system that John McCain calls "legalized bribery"—to skew the government in favor of their own narrow self-interest. That's why I'm devoting my time and treasure to hacking at a root cause of injustice: big money in politics and crony capitalism.

A nationwide poll of small-business owners commissioned by Small Business Majority found more than three-fourths (77 percent) of small employers say big businesses have a significant impact on government decisions and the political process, whereas a mere 24

percent say small businesses have a significant impact on the process.

The same poll shows 85 percent of small-business owners (the real "job creators") support efforts to get big money out of politics. This is consistent with other polls that say 80 percent of Americans—Republicans, Democrats, and independents—agree there is too much money being spent to influence elections and lawmakers.

People are right to view their representatives askance. A recent study affirmed that having money does, in fact, lead to increased access and influence in Washington. Researchers found that representatives were more likely to meet with people donating money than with a regular constituent, and laws were more likely to reflect wealthy special interests rather than the public interest.

Take for example the 2015 budget bill (H.R. 83), which included a provision written by Citigroup lobbyists to roll back part of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and

Consumer Protection Act and deregulate derivative trading. These are the same complicated financial devices that helped precipitate the economic meltdown in 2008.

These big-money groups, with their entourage of lobbyists, have suppressed the voices of regular citizens in Washington. They have knocked out our country's constitutional promise to "promote the general welfare" by politically privileging wealthy interests.

I decided to fight back. Last year I started a campaign, called the Stamp Stampede, to rally grassroots "we the people" to get big money out of politics. More than 30,000 people across the country—and the numbers are growing—are stamping paper currency with messages such as "Not to be Used for Buying Elections." We're turning actual paper money into millions of miniature billboards to create a mass visual demonstration of support to get money out of politics. We've even recruited hundreds of small businesses to

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The movement is rapidly growing. More than 550 towns and cities have passed anti-corruption measures to address big money in politics. President Obama and more than 150 members of Congress support an

amendment to overturn Citizens United. There is a lot more work to be done, but nothing worth doing comes without its challenges.

Our government “of the people, by the people, for the people” is in serious jeopardy. Together we can use something as simple as a rubber stamp to create a roar so loud that even Congress will be forced to act.

Ben Cohen, former CEO of Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream, is president of the board for People Power Initiatives, sponsors of the Stamp Stamped.

By Phyllis Zagano

End of an Inquisition?

The Vatican wraps up its three-year investigation of U.S. nuns. What's next for women in the church?

THE VATICAN REPORT on the three-year investigation of U.S. Catholic sisters landed softly in the national media in December, as major stories combined with Christmas to fill the news cycle. Good timing, if the intent was to bury it. But the story isn't over.

Some years ago, two Vatican offices, under the leadership of Pope Francis' predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, launched separate investigations of U.S. women religious, first of the individual orders and later of their leaders' membership organization.

Why? The general consensus seems to be that high-ranking conservative U.S. bishops were angry at sisters who had generally served as obedient poorly paid minions to do their bidding, but who now were infected with a certain “feminist” outlook on life.

A September 2008 conference on religious life, held at Massachusetts' Stonehill College, gathered conservative voices critical of how U.S. sisters had “modernized” following the Second Vatican Council. Within a few months, a Vatican office (the “Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life”) announced it would survey every group of “active” (vs. contemplative) U.S. Catholic sisters.

In addition, in January 2009, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the church's doctrinal watchdog, announced it would conduct a “doctrinal

assessment” of the U.S. sisters' major leadership organization, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious—claiming that LCWR diverged from church teaching on homosexuality, women's ordination, and the centrality of Jesus in belief. The as-yet-unreported investigation of the 1,500-member LCWR entailed a review of publications and speakers' texts and significant back-and-forth between LCWR and Vatican representatives.

During the communities investigation (now completed), the 325 women's religious orders received a detailed questionnaire about their lives and livelihood. Later, teams visited 90 motherhouses and prepared individual reports. An overall (secret) visitation report then went to the Vatican.

The Vatican's December 2014 report responds to the secret visitation report. While tossing nosegays at the sisters, its undercurrent of criticism dovetails with the doctrinal investigation and conservative calls to return to older traditions. The report advises sisters “not to displace Christ from the center of creation and of our faith,” and says those coming to religious life seek “formative communities” and “externally recognizable” signs—code words for convents and religious habits. Even so, the report acknowledges that Pope Francis asks for “still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church.”

From the Archives

March 1988

A Marketable God

RELIGION AND

electoral politics tend to be mutually debasing. Take the apparent exception, Jimmy Carter. His politics were informed by his theological insights: a regard for the poor and despised (he was the first U.S. president to take the Third World seriously); a sense of human limit (he did not take it for granted that Americans have a right to consume a disproportionate share of the world's goods); and a recognition of the humanity of others, even of enemies (the Soviet Union was not the Evil Empire for him). The result of this conjunction of theological and political views was a resounding rejection from the electorate, and especially from those who seemed closest to him on the theological spectrum, Southern Baptists. The lesson seems to be that it pays, in presidential politics, not to take your religion seriously. ... The preference of evangelicals for the religious stance of Ronald Reagan proved that pseudo-religion works best in our political races. President Reagan's religiosity barely rises above the level of superstition. Michael Deaver ... says that the president consults his horoscope every day, regularly carries five or so lucky charms in his pocket, and is "nuts for religious phenomena."...

Why would evangelicals and others reject a sincere believer in the gospel, like Carter, for Reagan's profession of a hodgepodge of make-believe beliefs? The reason is that Reagan brings them a more marketable God. ■

Garry Wills was the author of Reagan's America when this article appeared.



This collision of perspectives is a collision of history and vocation. Women in the early church—widows, virgins, and deacons—actively ministered in the community. As these three categories collapsed—widows and virgins entered monasteries headed by abbesses ordained to the diaconate—external ministry by women faded. Alternative volunteer ministries outside the cloister eventually developed into active “apostolic” life for women with its public ministries of education, health care, and the like. Individual religious orders answered contemporary needs, self-supporting in their establishment and running of schools and hospitals. Contemplative cloistered nuns remained, but apostolic women religious served the world, living even more public roles following Vatican II.

Today, most U.S. sisters live the updated lives mandated by Vatican II, and the interventions into their lives and leadership demonstrate that not all quarters of the church take kindly to their expanded horizons. Disagreement on what constitutes authentic religious life exists within their

ranks: About 20 years ago, a second, conservative leadership group, the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, arose. Its member orders were also investigated, but its leadership council was not.

The two investigations raised public support for the U.S. sisters, while U.S. bishops, already painted by media as dishonest harborers of priest-pederasts, suffered greater backlash. Unlike priests, most of whom do not belong to religious orders and are supported by parish donations, sisters earn salaries to support themselves and their ministries. Women are not likely to gain hierarchical power any time soon, but the Vatican of Pope Francis has somewhat uncomfortably at least recognized they do the real work of the church. ■

*Phyllis Zagano is a Catholic scholar and lecturer on contemporary spirituality and women's issues in the church. She currently holds a research appointment at Hofstra University in New York. Among her recent books are *Mysticism* and *The Spiritual Quest and Sacred Silence*.*

By Cynthia J. Martens

'God Always Provides'

A priest in Jordan opens his church's doors to Iraqis fleeing ISIS.

REV. KHALIL JAAR is a warm, passionate, and energetic man—and he needs to be. As the spiritual leader and “go to” guy for the 150 Iraqi Christian refugees living in his church in Amman, Jordan, he needs all the energy he can get.

When I met with Father Jaar at St. Mary, Mother of the Church congregation in Amman, it quickly became obvious how much he loves the refugees who now call this church home. Jaar, himself a refugee, knows something about the trials and tribulations of being forced to leave your home. He is the son of Palestinian refugees of Honduran descent. (His birth name is Carlos and he took the name Khalil when he became a Catholic priest.) He also knows something about the terror of war. Shortly after the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, he was abducted in Baghdad where he was serving, and “only by the grace of God was I freed,” he says.

Jaar is especially dedicated to the education of the Iraqi children forced to leave everything they knew, including their schools. In his overcrowded office, full of stacks of papers and files, Jaar pulls out a large binder. This is his personal reference book, with a page for each child in his care. It includes a photo, a short history of their family and background, their education to date, and also notes about their extracurricular activities and likes, such as soccer and music. It is important to know as much as possible about each child, he says, and make sure that they continue their education.

The Iraqis who have been arriving at St. Mary's since spring 2014, escaping the onslaught of ISIS, often come with nothing but the clothes on their backs. They have been traumatized and overwhelmed by their losses of possessions, home, and community. The children, while resilient and adapting

to their new lives, carry the scars of being terrorized. They witnessed extreme cruelty by ISIS soldiers and watched as their friends and neighbors turned against one another. One little girl had her ear sliced open when a militant yanked her earring out, saying it was against Islam to wear jewelry. A small boy had a bottle of milk violently knocked out of his hand; he was told they were permitted to take nothing as they were marched out of their village.

Father Jaar is sensitive to how much these children have suffered and does all he can to make them feel safe and secure in their temporary home. He continually reaches out to the community to provide food, mattresses, clothes, and the basic necessities of life. The refugees, in turn, do as much as they can to help, cleaning the church's common rooms that they share and cooking meals in the small church kitchen. Jaar says they often opt to eat more vegetables and less meat as a way to keep costs down. They are aware of the generosity of parishioners and the wider community, and they want to do all they can to make themselves less of a burden. To this, Jaar says, "We do not consider them refugees, but guests."

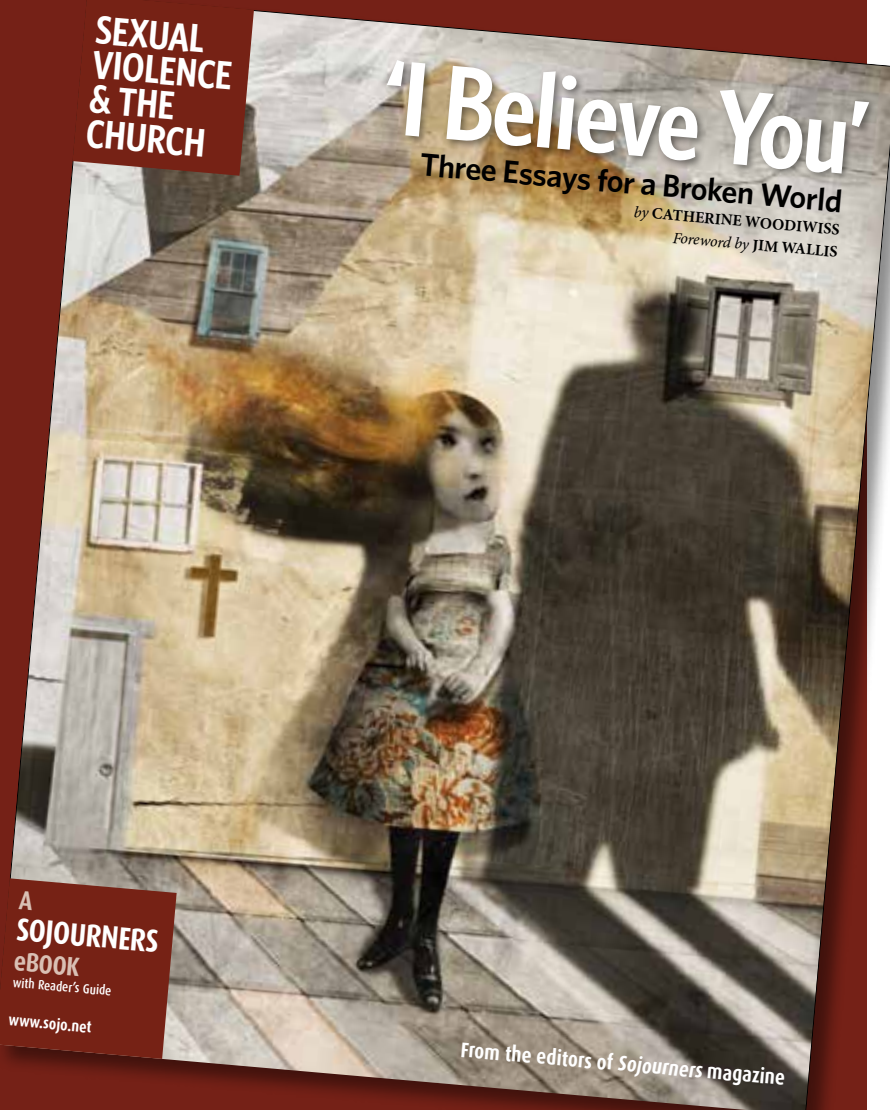
Slowly the Iraqis, as well as other Syrians and Palestinians, are moving to nearby apartments that have been rented by the church. It's crowded, with two or three families sharing each apartment, but it offers more privacy than sleeping on floor mats in the church. They are waiting to be granted asylum, a process that may take years.

"We don't know how many days or months they will stay with us," says Jaar, "and that is why any kind of help is welcome." This is when a strong faith is needed, and Jaar is a man of strong faith. As I prepare to leave, he shares one more story of a moment when they were in dire need of supplies for another new group of refugees, and a truck arrived that same day bearing contributions from a local Christian businessperson. A broad smile lights up his face at the memory, and he says, "God always provides." ■

Cynthia J. Martens is senior director of circulation and production at Sojourners. She traveled to Jordan in late 2014 on a trip sponsored by the Jordan Tourism Board of North America.

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A History of (Non)Violence

I WALKED THROUGH the halls of the Rosa Parks Museum in Montgomery, Ala.—slowly. Original documents lined the walls of the nation’s central memorial to the local actions that helped trigger the national mass movement for civil rights. To skim would have been a sacrilege. Each document was evidence. Evidence of struggle. Evidence that America’s apartheid happened. Evidence of a miracle.

The museum is like a labyrinth. Each room builds on the last, adding color and depth to a reality most of the nation has only experienced in the two-dimensional contours of sepia-toned documentary footage and pictures.

I entered the room with the kitchen table where Martin Luther King Jr. dropped to his knees and



are less than human. They had dropped one too many coins into the slot only to have to give up their seat to a white person if the bus was too full. The blacks of Montgomery refused to comply any longer with their society’s sin. They couldn’t continue taking up the public shovel to heap another pile of dirt on the carcass of their deadened dignity. So they walked.

And weeks into walking, the White Citizens’ Council called their protest “violent.”

How could not riding a bus be considered

violent? Especially when black people were being lynched, tortured, and terrorized throughout the South.

Then it hit me, as if someone had knocked the legs out from under me. I dropped to my knees in front of King’s table. I got it! The boycott was “violent” because it nearly put the Montgomery bus company out of business. What constituted “violence” to the White Citizens’ Council was an attack on their bank accounts—loss of money, not life.

My time in Montgomery has been haunting me lately. It started last August when police opened fire on protesters in Ferguson, Mo., with rubber and wooden bullets. It continued as the body count began to mount around St. Louis: four boys

shot dead by police in four months. It weighed heavy on my soul as the annual numbers of police, security, and vigilante killings began to be revealed: In 2013, there were 313 extrajudicial killings of black men, women, and children, according to “Operation Ghetto Storm,” a report by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. One every 28 hours. In fact, black people were victims of twice as many extrajudicial killings than they were in 1892, the deadliest year of Jim Crow lynching.

And yet many are calling today’s protesters “violent” because they yell, they look angry, and they don’t play by the rules. What constitutes violence? In one sense violence is anything that tears down, destroys, or disrupts the well-being of anything. Theologically, though, is it “violence” to use nonviolent means to tear down, destroy, or disrupt systems that oppress and suppress the image of God on earth?

Perhaps this is what Jesus meant when he said, “The kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12).

Perhaps the kingdom of heaven had suffered violence through the Roman Empire’s oppression of the image of God on earth. And perhaps here Jesus is calling his followers to disrupt the violent suppression of God’s image through means that are nonviolent—but forceful. But we must know we risk being called “violent” by the world—the world that violently protects and worships the Caesar on coins, rather than worshipping God and forcefully protecting God’s image in people. ■

Lisa Sharon Harper is senior director of mobilizing for Sojourners and co-author of Forgive Us: Confessions of a Compromised Faith (Zondervan, 2014).



Many are calling today’s protesters “violent” because they yell, they look angry, and they don’t play by the rules.

prayed, weeping, scared, and still holding onto the last vestiges of his personal dream for a middle-class preacher’s life. For my tour group, the room was about that table, but the documents lining the walls like wallpaper caught my eye.

One stood out. It was a full-page newspaper ad with a letter from the White Citizens’ Council of Montgomery to the blacks of Montgomery. The letter pleaded with the black citizens to “stop their violent attack on their city.”

The first time I read “Stop this violence,” I was befuddled. What violence?

I scanned my memory for any trace of violence in the Montgomery bus boycott by the blacks who engaged in economic protest, refusing a public service that proclaimed and enforced a spiritual lie: Blacks

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Nuclear Weapons: Time for Abolition

IMAGINE IF YOU will a world in which the most destructive weapons were “conventional” explosives. These bombs, often with nicknames such as “Daisy Cutter” or “bunker buster” or even the “Mother of All Bombs,” have enormous power: The Vietnam-era Daisy Cutter, one of the largest conventional weapons ever used, was designed to flatten a forest into a helicopter landing zone with a blast equal to about 15,000 pounds of TNT.

Now imagine that someone says, “Those conventional bombs aren’t destructive enough. Let’s invent a weapon a million times more powerful, one that releases radiation that magnifies the killing effects for generations. And let’s make 16,000 of those weapons.”

A sane world would respond, “You’ve gotta be kidding.”

But in the real world, it’s no joke.

Today, 70 years after the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the world has 16,400 nuclear weapons—93 percent of them in the arsenals of the U.S. and Russia. The first H-bomb had the force of around 10 million tons of TNT, more than



International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

And for the first time ever, so has the pope. In December, the Vatican delivered a statement to the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons, which was hosted by the government of Austria “to strengthen the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.” The Vatican statement, titled “Nuclear Disarmament: Time for Abolition,” argued that “the very possession of nuclear weapons, even for purposes of deterrence, is morally problematic.”

That’s a big deal—in the past, the Vatican and other religious institutions have given their “conditional acceptance” of nuclear weapons in the context of deterrence. Now, the Vatican says, “the system of nuclear deterrence can no longer be deemed a policy that stands firmly on moral ground” and thus “The time has come to embrace the abolition of nuclear weapons.”

It may not be obvious (yet) here in the United States, but there’s a vigorous and growing movement in Europe and elsewhere that’s working to make real that vision of a nuclear-free world. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons—a coalition of more than 360

organizations in 90-some countries—hosted a two-day conference in conjunction with the governmental gathering in Vienna.

The conference, with the unofficial theme of “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for,” was the largest ever civil society gathering on the abolition of nuclear weapons, with 600 participants from more than 70 countries. Topics ranged from the consequences of nuclear explosions to the moral and ethical responsibility to prevent them; the substance was equal parts factual, strategic, and inspirational. Hope, and perhaps precedence, was found in recent successful efforts to ban land mines and cluster munitions, and other work against chemical and biological weapons.

2015 is an important year regarding nuclear weapons, with the Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference in April, the 70th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, and other events. And the worldwide movement to abolish nuclear weapons is encouraging.

A key question is, will it jump the pond? ■

Jim Rice, editor of Sojourners, attended the Vienna conferences with a media delegation sponsored by the Nuclear Threat Initiative.

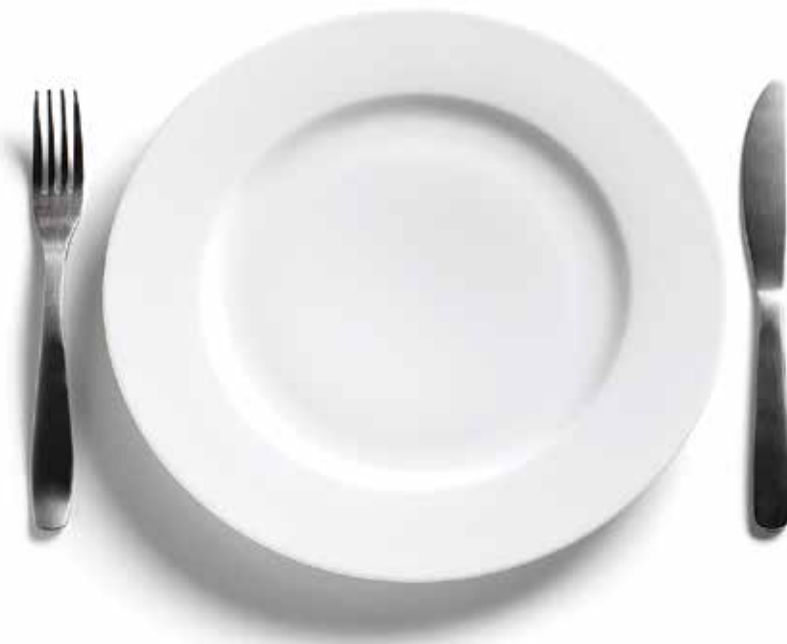


“We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.”

a million times as powerful as the worst conventional weapons.

So in some ways it comes as no surprise that first responders—groups on the front lines of dealing with disasters—have become leaders in the movement to abolish nuclear weapons. For organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the reasoning is clear: There simply is no way to adequately respond in the aftermath of a nuclear explosion. Thus the Red Cross has called for legally binding steps toward the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

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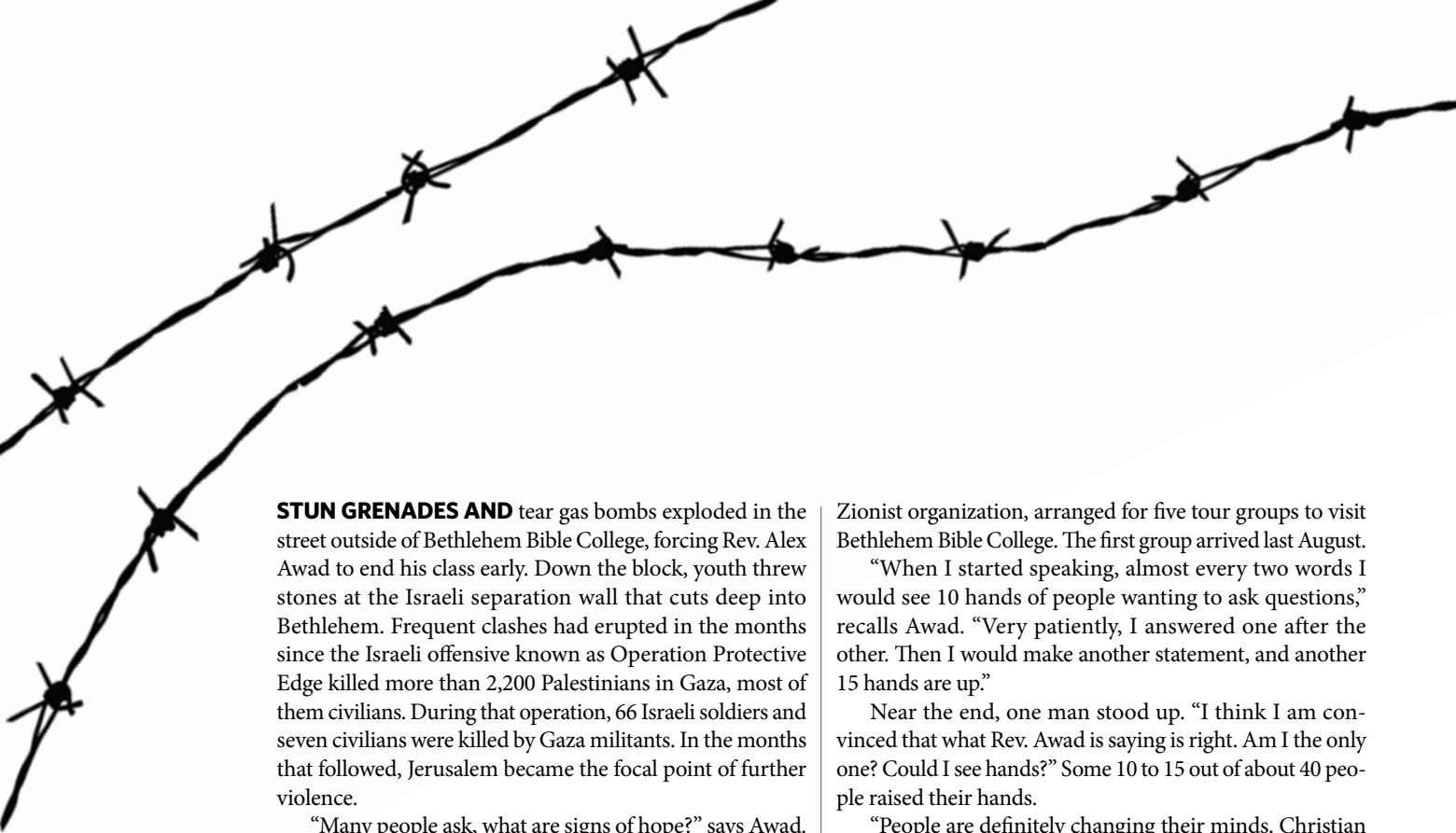
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STUN GRENADES AND tear gas bombs exploded in the street outside of Bethlehem Bible College, forcing Rev. Alex Awad to end his class early. Down the block, youth threw stones at the Israeli separation wall that cuts deep into Bethlehem. Frequent clashes had erupted in the months since the Israeli offensive known as Operation Protective Edge killed more than 2,200 Palestinians in Gaza, most of them civilians. During that operation, 66 Israeli soldiers and seven civilians were killed by Gaza militants. In the months that followed, Jerusalem became the focal point of further violence.

“Many people ask, what are signs of hope?” says Awad. While the facts on the ground get worse, he names one encouraging trend: “Many evangelicals are moving from the Israeli side into what I think is the peace and justice side.”

Here are seven signs that he’s right:

1. Evangelicals are listening to Palestinian Christian voices. Jerusalem-born with a degree from a U.S. Bible college, Awad is uniquely suited to speak to evangelicals—including some unlikely guests. John Hagee, leader of Christians United for Israel, the U.S.’s largest Christian

Zionist organization, arranged for five tour groups to visit Bethlehem Bible College. The first group arrived last August.

“When I started speaking, almost every two words I would see 10 hands of people wanting to ask questions,” recalls Awad. “Very patiently, I answered one after the other. Then I would make another statement, and another 15 hands are up.”

Near the end, one man stood up. “I think I am convinced that what Rev. Awad is saying is right. Am I the only one? Could I see hands?” Some 10 to 15 out of about 40 people raised their hands.

“People are definitely changing their minds. Christian leaders who used to visit Israel without being exposed to the other side are now asking to meet Palestinian Christians,” says Munther Isaac, Awad’s colleague at Bethlehem Bible College and director of its biannual Christ at the Checkpoint conferences.

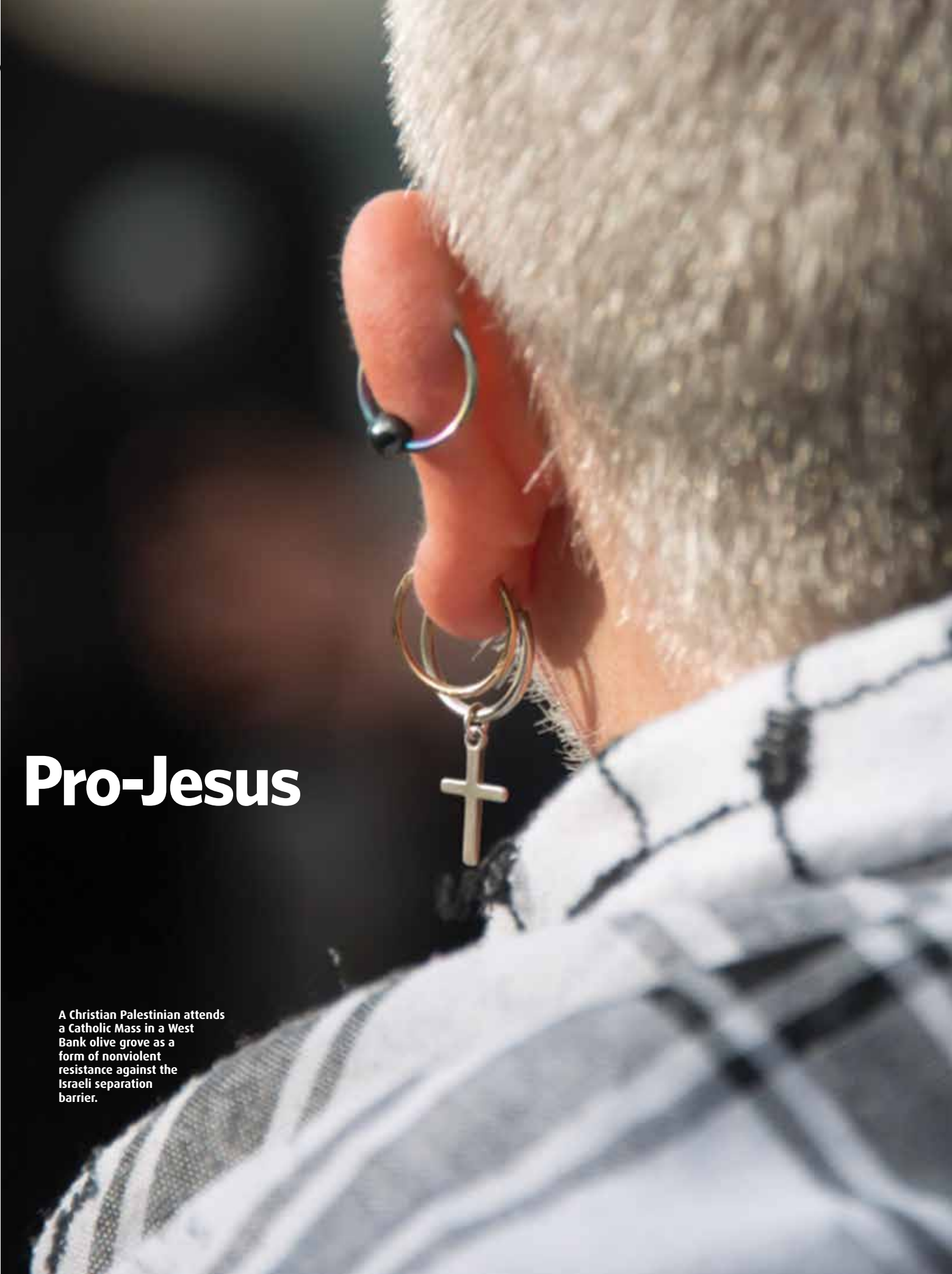
While Palestinian Christian groups such as Sabeel have mobilized mainline churches for decades, Christ at the Checkpoint specifically targets evangelicals. U.S. gatherings such as Impact Holy Land, Q Conference, Empowered21, and Catalyst have also brought Palestinian

Pro-Israeli, Pro-Palestinian,

Evangelicals are no longer automatically taking a one-sided approach to conflict in the Middle East—and with that change comes hope for a troubled region.

Text and photos by **RYAN RODRICK BEILER**

“Christian leaders who used to visit Israel without being exposed to the other side are now asking to meet Palestinian Christians.”

A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a person's ear. The person has short, light-colored hair. They are wearing a silver-colored hoop earring with a small cross pendant hanging from it. The background is blurred, showing a plaid shirt. The lighting is bright, casting shadows on the ear and hair.

Pro-Jesus

A Christian Palestinian attends a Catholic Mass in a West Bank olive grove as a form of nonviolent resistance against the Israeli separation barrier.



40 percent of U.S. evangelical leaders have changed their thinking about Israel and Palestine over the past 15 years.

Christians to evangelical audiences.

Documentary films, such as Porter Speakman's *With God on Our Side* and Yasmine Perni's *The Stones Cry Out*, are also exposing evangelicals to new perspectives. Says Perni, "By seeing the conflict through Christian eyes, something changes in how people accept the Palestinian story."

2. Leaders are getting educated and helping to educate others. "At Willow Creek," says Lynne Hybels, speaking of the church she and her husband, Bill, started 40 years ago, "we've spent the last three years educating our highest levels of leadership, taking them on alternative Holy Land trips to learn from people on all sides of the conflict: Jewish settlers, Palestinians living in refugee camps, Muslim sheiks, Jewish rabbis, Palestinian pastors, human rights activists on both sides, journalists, politicians."

"In each community there are those who reject peace and those who daily pursue peace," says Hybels. "We want our people to be so captivated by the peacemakers that they will stand in solidarity with them."

Other groups organize similar "multi-narrative" pilgrimages. "Our approach is to familiarize Americans with the different historical narratives and to help them build relationships with Israelis and Palestinians," says Todd Deatherage of The Telos Group. "In this way, we hope that American leaders invest their energies in resolution of the current conflict rather than things that perpetuate it."

According to a National Association of Evangelicals poll, 40 percent of U.S. evangelical leaders have changed their thinking about Israel and Palestine over the past 15 years, with the most common change being "a greater awareness of the struggles faced by the Palestinian people."

3. Young evangelicals are more passionate and less prejudiced. "With younger evangelicals," says Isaac, "there is an openness because they're very interested in social justice issues. They want to put their faith into action."

During Megan Giesecke's second year at Wheaton College, a friend studied in the Holy Land. His testimony inspired her to attend the Christ at the Checkpoint conference in 2012 with a group from Wheaton.

"Once in Palestine, I was shocked," says

Giesecke, who recalls seeing the separation wall, meeting Israeli activists and settlers, going through a crowded checkpoint at 6 a.m., and hearing about everyday experiences of occupation.

When she decided to volunteer for a year in Jerusalem with Sabeel, her mother objected: "We are supporters of Israel, as Christians and as citizens of the United States!"

But after eight months of emails and Skype calls culminating in their own trip from Dallas to witness firsthand the situation in Palestine, Giesecke's parents abandoned their unquestioning support for Israel.

In Giesecke's experience, personal stories are more convincing than political arguments. "You want to shake them with the reality, but many evangelicals can be turned off to that sort of strong approach. They need reassurance that you care for both sides."

4. Evangelicals of color know injustice when they see it. While black and Latino Christians see parallels with their own histories of oppression, they're also demonstrating how a balanced approach need not ignore unbalanced power structures.

Many African-American leaders hesitate to criticize Israel because of the important role that Jews played in the civil rights movement. While acknowledging that legacy, Dennis Edwards, pastor of Sanctuary Covenant Church in Minneapolis, says, "During our visit, I found the treatment of Palestinians to be reminiscent of the way blacks were discriminated against in the U.S."

"For me, this looks like apartheid," says Moss Ntlha, general secretary of the Evangelical Alliance in South Africa, recalling a conversation with Jewish friends. "Between you and me—I am black, you are white South African Jews—who do you think has more credibility in deciding whether or not this is apartheid?"

Ntlha's honesty comes from respect: "I continue to love and pray for Israel. But it is precisely because we love Israel that we must help Israel recover a sense of the God of justice who they revealed to us."

"The most inspiring evangelical responses we're seeing are people doing a power analysis of Palestine and Israel that refracts onto their own lives," says Sarah Thompson, executive director of Christian Peacemaker Teams. She recently co-led a delegation with Mariano Avila of Hope Equals, which organizes study tours for college and seminary students.

"We take these very privileged kids," says Avila, "and by the time they come back they understand what it means to be an ally, they understand the power imbalance, and they understand how to have discourse without dehumanizing anybody."

"Hope Equals is pro-people," Avila emphasizes. "We stand for human rights and human life. So if Israel bombs Gaza, that's a problem. If Hamas launches rockets at Israel or threatens human life, we're not going to stand with them."

"As a Mexican, I come at it from my own embodiment of oppressor and oppressed," says Avila. "I have very clear lineage from Spain, but I also have Aztec and Zapotec blood."

"The colonizer isn't necessarily always an ideological colonizer, and you shouldn't demonize that person. But the amount of power that each group has bears on the amount of responsibility that it has," says Avila. "It's Israelis who control the freedoms and rights of Palestinians—not the other way around. So of course our actions are more pressuring towards Israelis and more advocating for Palestinians."

5. Jewish voices are broadening the boundaries of debate. "There is a push from the Jewish left wing in the U.S.," observes Avila. "People like Jon Stewart have played an enormous role in opening up the dialogue for Jews in America to talk about it. And if Jews in America are talking about it, then Christians in America are talking about it."

Strikingly, Christians are often more Zionist than are Jews. A 2013 Pew Research Center poll showed that white evangelicals are twice as likely as Jews to believe that "Israel was given to the Jewish people by God" (82 percent vs. 40 percent).

"Young people tell me that they grow up in churches being told that Jews are God's chosen people," says Dale Hanson Bourke, author of *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*:



"During our visit [to the Holy Land], I found the treatment of Palestinians to be reminiscent of the way blacks were discriminated against in the U.S." —Dennis Edwards



"Many evangelicals are moving from the Israeli side into what I think is the peace and justice side."

—Alex Awad (right, with his brother Mubarak)



"If you go to the campuses today in the U.S., the atmosphere is totally different than it was 10 years ago."

—Yonatan Shapira, former Israeli Air Force pilot

Tough Questions, Direct Answers. "Then they go to universities where Jewish students laugh at their Christian Zionism and want no part of it."

"If you go to the campuses today in the U.S., the atmosphere is totally different than it was 10 years ago," says Yonatan Shapira, a former Israeli Air Force pilot turned solidarity activist. "Many of the activists in the Palestine committees are Jewish students. Their parents were supporting the right-wing Jewish lobbies, but the second generation is with the Palestinians working together side by side."

Palestinian evangelicals have also built bridges with Israeli Messianic Jews. "We differ when it comes to issues of politics and eschatology," says Awad. "But through the years we have learned to love them. They have learned to love us. They have been defending us when it comes to attacks by the radical side."

6. When governments fail, grassroots movements grow. As talks broke down last year, U.S. officials condemned Israel's ongoing settlement expansion but did nothing to stop it. The carnage that unfolded in Gaza was similarly met with harsh words but no real action. For its part, Palestinian leadership has shown little strategy beyond seeking symbolic international recognition.

Lacking confidence in politicians, many activists on the ground are now calling for grassroots international pressure, including the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement modeled on campaigns

targeting apartheid South Africa. The Kairos Palestine document, signed by some 3,000 Palestinian Christians and the heads of 13 historic denominations, calls for "boycott and divestment as tools of nonviolence for justice, peace, and security for all."

"BDS will save human life," says Awad, a Kairos signatory. "It will save Jewish life. It will save Palestinian life. Because it will give the international community and Palestinians a way to fight oppression without spilling blood."

However, even some sympathetic U.S. evangelical leaders argue that BDS is one-sided, counterproductive, and will end conversations before they've even started. Instead, evangelicals tend to promote efforts focusing on dialogue and personal reconciliation.

Though none have endorsed full-scale BDS, other churches, including Presbyterian Church USA, the United Methodist Church, and several Quaker bodies, have taken various measures to either screen occupation-complicit investments or boycott settlement products.

Responding to PCUSA's divestment measure, Rabbi Steve Gutow of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs warned that such actions will "have a devastating impact on relations" with mainstream Jewish groups.

At the same time, Jewish groups that support BDS are growing. Jewish Voice for Peace, which lobbies churches to support divestment, reported a jump of 50,000 names on its email list in 2014 and a tripling of Facebook "likes"—which as of this writing

stands at 199,384—compared to 93,781 for AIPAC and 25,850 for the more moderate J Street, both of which oppose BDS.

7. Evangelicals are trading pop-prophecy for prophetic theology. While default Zionism still permeates the subculture, its underlying theology is being left behind by many evangelical scholars.

"I was surprised to learn that dispensationalism is no longer taught in most evangelical seminaries," says Hanson Bourke. "Since that is the very basis of much of Christian Zionist teaching, it means that most young pastors are not trained in the theological view that gives Jews and Israel a special dispensation."

Others are taking a more direct approach. "We are challenging evangelicals that rather than looking at the Middle East through the lens of prophecy," says Isaac, "that they look at it through the teaching of Jesus to be peacemakers."

Ultimately, better theology will inspire activism, says Isaac. "In the past we used to say there will never be peace in the Middle East until Jesus comes. This is a very typical evangelical response. Now we're saying rather than waiting for divine intervention—get busy! Listen and respond to God's call to action!" ■

Ryan Rodrick Beiler (ryanrodrickbeiler.com) is a freelance photojournalist in Oslo, Norway, and a member of the *Activestills* collective (activestills.org). He lived in the occupied Palestinian territories from 2010-14.



"If I was going to make
a commitment to living
in the city, then I needed
to commit to farming
in the city."

—Gail Taylor, at work on
Three Part Harmony Farm

A Farm Grows in Brookland

Gail Taylor hopes that Three Part Harmony Farm in D.C.'s Brookland neighborhood becomes the city's first commercial farm since the 1930s • by KIMBERLY BURGE

ON A TWO-ACRE parcel of land in Washington, D.C., tucked behind the provincial house of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Gail Taylor offers a visitor dragon's lingerie.

"It kind of looks like fishnet stockings—that's how it got the name," Taylor says, holding up the heirloom snap bean, its pale yellow-green hull mottled with purple.

Across the aisle, Jack Be Little miniature pumpkins hide under leafy canopies. There are tomatoes and mustard greens, eggplant and legumes, lettuce and squash. "We're doing a lot of intercropping and companion planting now," Taylor says. So asparagus lies next to parsley, both behind a bed of raspberry bushes. Flowers also abound, with bursts of hot pink blossoms and purple clover that beautify the landscape while attracting pollinators.

For nearly 100 years this area, owned by the Oblates, a Catholic religious order, was only a grass field, a place where the priests would sometimes play soccer. In 2011, Taylor approached an Oblate priest and requested use of the land. "They were amenable and excited," Taylor says. "They're ecologically forward thinking, and they lead the Catholics in creation care."

The space has become a location for Three Part Harmony Farm, the urban

agricultural project Taylor established in D.C. She hopes it will become the first commercial farm in the District of Columbia since 1939, producing locally grown food to be sold in stores and farmers' markets. First, there are some hurdles that the 36-year-old farmer must clear.

Taylor came to Washington in the late 1990s to work in social justice organizations. During a period of unemployment in 2005, she began volunteering at a farm in Upper Marlboro, Md. She enjoyed the work and began to think about a career change. The farm offered her a job the following spring, and she spent the next five years learning farming techniques.

After this apprenticeship, the logical next step was to think of establishing her own farm. At the same time, Taylor was in the process of forming an intentional community in the District's Petworth neighborhood. "I decided if I was going to make a long-term commitment to living in the city," Taylor says, "then I needed to commit to farming in the city, even if that means, for the first few years, developing a property where I can't make money."

While she envisioned a market farm in the city, lawyers for the Oblates investigated D.C. laws and found that if the order housed a farm that sold its products, it would be threatening its nonprofit 501(c)(3) tax

Photos by Rick Reinhard



"If farming were just about money, then this is the wrong career."

status. They would also be responsible for the taxes on the assessed value of the land—an amount estimated at \$50,000 for this two-acre spot. The venture, for now, had to remain noncommercial, the food produced shared between Taylor's community, the volunteers who work on the farm, and the Oblates, who have a particular fondness for the potatoes that Three Part Harmony grows.

Unwilling to give up her dream of a working farm, Taylor shifted back into activist mode. She took the problem to D.C. city council member David Grosso, who lives near the area and who toured the farm. Grosso, along with city council member Mary Cheh, introduced the D.C. Urban Farming and Food Security Act of 2014. The legislation identifies vacant properties suitable for urban agriculture, provides a tax abatement for private land owners who lease their land to urban farmers and a tax credit for fresh produce donated to food pantries, and ensures that tax-exempt entities will not lose their tax-exempt status if grounds are used for urban farming or community gardens. The D.C. council unanimously passed the legislation in December; at press time, it awaited the mayor's signature and funding to be fully enacted.

While this legislation will make it more financially feasible for people to grow fresh produce in the city, Taylor acknowledges that urban farming on a commercial scale is still a bit of a hard sell.

"SOME THINGS ARE very easy," Taylor

says. "Should we have healthy food? Yes. Should our kids have gardens at their schools and learn what kale plants look like? Yes. Is using space in the city for growing vegetables the best, most efficient use of our space? A lot of people aren't sure. That's harder to convince them of. How many people could live on this property if we built a building here? But urban planning and what we do with our space in our city isn't just about farms and making sure we have local produce. It's about parks and green space. It's about taking up asphalt and concrete. It's realizing the quality of life isn't just about having condos and liquor stores and places that pay a lot into the tax rolls.

"There's that thing you can't measure. How is your life impacted when you feel this soil under your fingernails? Seeing the plants and the birds and the animals—I don't know how you can place a value on that."

Taylor has to laugh at the approach many people make to farming in the city. "We're all so disconnected from the land," she says. "We don't have a clue what it takes, especially when you talk about urban farming. People have a lot of misconceptions. They come up with strange ideas. Like, 'There's this industrial wasteland site here, nobody wants to do anything with it. Let's have a community garden here!' Really? We can't grow food there! It shows how little we value farming, only taking land no one wants, not thinking of the toxicity of the soil and the vegetables that would be grown.

"People need to understand the realities

of growing vegetables. Soil is the most valuable part, and you don't just develop it overnight. In a city garden space, you can't just truck in \$25,000 of topsoil, grow some carrots, and call it a day. It's a long-term investment."

After three seasons of working the land behind the Oblates, Taylor estimates that 2015 will be the first season the farm will be able to grow food with the soil sustaining and feeding itself.

FOOD AS MEDICINE. Food as culture. Food as the future. This trio inspired Three Part Harmony Farm. When she speaks in public about her work, Taylor brings along bulbs of garlic, cotton bolls, and ears of corn to illustrate their interconnectedness.

"Garlic as medicine was an important crop at the farm where I used to work. It can cure you of every ailment, including people standing too close to you," Taylor says with a chuckle.

As a young farmer who is also African American, Taylor has grappled with the culture and history of farming and what she chooses to grow. "Everybody's identity influences them as a farmer," she says. "For me, the story of who I am, what I decided to grow, and who I grow for comes from my family story. First, being forced to labor in the fields, then later fleeing as quickly as possible to get higher and higher levels of education so they never have to touch dirt again."

Growing cotton, for Taylor, represented this ancestral struggle. No one sat her down and explicitly explained that her grandfather, who could not read or write, picked cotton. To avoid that life, her father went into the military, serving and nearly dying in the Vietnam War, so he could go to college and earn a degree. Now Taylor and her cousins have progressed even further, with graduate degrees. Her vocational shift to farming required an internal examination of the sort of farmer she wanted to be. "Part of being a black farmer is doing the things our ancestors did every day, but waking up and fighting for my right to work in dignity," Taylor says.

"I didn't know if I could handle growing cotton," she adds. "I'm trying to establish myself as a different sort of farmer, a 21st-century farmer, growing vegetables without



chemicals, without pain and suffering, without trauma. We had a barbecue at our house and in conversation I said I don't know if I could pick cotton. And a friend told me, just embrace it. You're choosing to grow something that has meant so many different things to people. Just claim it. It's yours now. So that's what I did." Now Taylor grows half a row of cotton, for decoration at home and special functions, and "for my grandpa," she says.

THREE PART HARMONY Farm is part of Seed Keepers, a people-of-color-led seed-saving collective that maintains the culture, knowledge, ancestry, and actual seeds grown from North Carolina to New York City. The collective is based at Tierra Negra Farm in North Carolina; members maintain seed banks and educate one another in farming practices.

The future of corn in particular concerns Taylor because of the wide influx of GMO (genetically modified organism) corn. Because corn is pollinated by its seeds blowing in the wind, it is especially susceptible to cross-pollination and contamination with GMO seeds. "Food sovereignty has everything to do with people being able to choose what they eat and farmers being able to choose what they grow," Taylor says. "The companies promoting GMOs are the opposite of that. Their main interest is making money and getting the most people to buy their product, and the chemicals you also have to buy to make them grow. They're making it harder for people who don't want

to buy their product to then be outliers. And they're doing this all over the world."

To resist this sort of takeover, Taylor again combines her dual vocations as farmer and activist. In 2012, she helped establish a cooperative, the Community Farming Alliance, which is aimed toward women, people of color, and gender-nonconforming people—"basically all the minority farmers

something big," Taylor explains. "I also think, for me, it's a story about knowing what saving seeds is all about and how that can inform my faith. This is the first year we've committed so much space to growing seeds [for future seasons] as opposed to just food. With seeds, you need to wait a long time. There were many weeks I would come to see each stage, from the flowering stage to mak-

"Part of being a black farmer is doing the things our ancestors did every day, but waking up and fighting for my right to work in dignity."

who don't get access the way other farmers do." Members pool their resources and energy to buy seeds and soil in bulk, and to support each other's efforts. They also bridge the rural-urban farming divide. "We really wanted to be intentional about saying that we're in the city now," Taylor says, "but we want to maintain partnerships and especially build on our connections with black farmers in the mid-Atlantic and the South."

Farming has also enriched Taylor's Christian faith in unexpected ways, especially as she thinks about the gospel parables originally directed at an agriculturally based audience. Take, for example, the story of the mustard seeds, a revelation she shared at her ecumenical, lay-led church in D.C.

"When I was small, I always heard this story about how something small becomes

ing the seeds to waiting for them to dry. I was thinking, That's a lot of lettuce we could have harvested in that time. But we didn't. We waited and let that space be saved for the seeds."

"If [farming] were just about money," Taylor says, "then this is the wrong career. I think we're creating a beautiful, healing, inspiring space every day. And we get that benefit that is intangible. All of us do. We're creating this space that's magical and you can't explain it and you can't put a monetary value on it." ■

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The Galilee Basin in central Queensland, Australia, could become the biggest coal mine on earth.

Andrew Quilty

Every Time I Look Into the Holy Book

I HAVE SOMETIMES been dismayed by the lack of speed that some churches and denominations have shown when it came to tackling environmental issues. On the question of divestment from fossil fuels, for instance, the Unitarians have been forthrightly in favor, and the United Church of Christ as well (and the Rockefellers!).

Churches are profiting from desecration like this—and every time they look into the account books they should tremble.

But the Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Anglicans are, by and large, dragging their feet as usual.

Sometimes I confess to imagining that God herself might be getting a bit impatient, too—how else to explain the name of the site for the next great fossil-fuel battle?

It will happen in Australia's Galilee Valley, a remote basin many hours from the continent's cities. At the moment it's basically untouched, but plans call for it to become The Biggest Coal Mine on Earth. There is enough coal beneath its soil to

provide 6 percent of the carbon that would take us past the two-degree rise in temperature scientists have given as the ultimate red line. That is to say, one valley in one nation (a nation with one-third of 1 percent of the planet's population) can do 6 percent of the job of wrecking the planet. One valley!

One valley that happens to carry one of the most sacred names in Christendom. I remember my church high school youth group days, when Loretta Lynn exploded in song: "Put Your Hand in the Hand (of the Man from Galilee)." It was actually a great lyric, one that went straight to the radicalism of the gospel ("Every time I look into the Holy Book I wanna tremble / when I read about the part where the carpenter cleared the temple"). In this case, the "buyers and sellers" are all billionaires—people such as Gautam Adani, on whose corporate jet Narendra Modi flew last year in his successful campaign to run India, or Gina Rinehart, the Aussie mining heiress and fourth richest woman in the world who once lauded Africans for being willing to work for two dollars a day.

Resistance to the plans is forming. Sometime this year,

as initial work begins on building the port necessary to ship all this coal abroad where it can be burned, protesters will be chaining themselves to rail lines and blocking bulldozers. But at least as important will be the fight to keep banks from financing the work. Already many have been scared off—even Goldman Sachs said it wanted no part of the project. But others will doubtless consider it, and for those of us far removed from coal mines and oil pipelines, this is a chance to make our feelings known.

Especially if we happen to belong to a religious faith that, after all, was born in a place like Galilee. Yes, it's a coincidence—but the right kind of coincidence, the kind that might bring the timid churches off the sidelines a little and get them engaged in the most consequential battle of our time. At the moment, as the owners of energy company stocks, they're mostly just profiting from desecration like this—and every time they look into the account books they should tremble. ■



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Coventry Cathedral photo

The Cross of Nails in Coventry Cathedral in England symbolized the desire for reconciliation with Germany in the years after 1945.

Good Friday

The tale of nails and wood
is retold on the BBC from Winchester,
with hymns about a balm in Gilead,
a wondrous cross, and the choirboys' echo
of the Fauré *Requiem*. Cardinal Newman
sends blessings from the grave,
and the organ grumbles "Amen."

Oddly enough, the sun has emerged today
after weeks of rain to wrap the world
in its pale shroud. The week
has been hard: a cousin rushed to hospital
with pneumonia, a friend trembling
with Parkinson's, an old acquaintance
placed "in care," looking for home
and cursing the staff at the locked front door.

In the pub, Peter and his brothers
joke about Leo's ashes in the garage.
He was the youngest. Who's next?
They have finished another Good Friday Walk—
nine miles, seven churches, a pint of bitter.

They talk of their father's letter, newly resurrected
from a cardboard box, forty-nine crumbling pages
in his own sure hand, a wartime story of troops,
destroyers, German subs. The young man
on the ship knew not where he was going,
just following orders, except for the deception
of the letter smuggled out from the harbor in India
to his wife Mary. He called her his "budgie,"
sent kisses to the children.

Tomorrow will be empty and quiet,
time for a drive to Bakewell
through the ever-winding hills. The road
turns silver, scrolling down the mountain
through meadows dotted with newborn lambs.

Donna Pucciani's most recent collection of poetry is
Hanging Like Hope on the Equinox.

Quit Picking on the Pharisees!

A prominent Jewish scholar of the New Testament argues that Christian criticism of the Pharisees is anti-Semitic.

by AMY-JILL LEVINE

PEJORATIVE COMMENTS about racial and ethnic minorities, GLBTQI people, and the poor appropriately receive public censure. But say something negative about Pharisees, and the response is likely to be a hearty “amen.”

When anti-Pharisaic comments appear, especially from church pulpits or Christian magazines, few complain. And when correctives are suggested, the responses are usually something like, “Of course not all Pharisees were money-loving, sanctimonious hypocrites.” The comparison to other bigoted comments—“Of course not all Latinos are illegal; of course not all African Americans are lazy”—should tell us how insufficient the excuses are.

Just as we are heirs of centuries of racism, we are heirs of two millennia of negative stereotypes of Pharisees and, by extension, of Jews—for it is substantially from Pharisaic teaching that rabbinic Judaism springs. Whenever sermons and Bible studies proclaim that Jesus’ views concerning social justice are contrary to Jewish views grounded in Pharisaic teaching, they promote bad history and bad theology.

The pastors and priests who make such comments are not anti-Semites. Even Pope Francis, who is certainly no bigot, speaks of Pharisees as “Closed-minded men, men who are so attached to the laws, to the letter of the law, that they were always closing the doorway to hope, love, and salvation.” Rather, these interpreters are unaware of the history of the Pharisees and unaware as well of how these claims about Pharisees often bleed over into anti-Jewish invective.

The gospels charge the Pharisees

The title of the painting “The Pharisees Conspire Together,” by French artist James Tissot (1836-1902), perpetuated cultural prejudices against Jews.



with being hypocrites, fools,



and a brood of vipers, full of extortion, greed, and iniquity.

We are heirs of two millennia of negative stereotypes of Pharisees and, by extension, of Jews.

Until we address these fundamental errors, bad history and bad theology will continue.



In this interpretation, the Pharisees appear to epitomize everything antithetical to an ethos of justice and peace. For example, in a 2009 God's Politics blog post, we read that the "Pharisees thought Jesus was making himself unclean by eating with sinners in the house of a tax collector (Matthew 9:9-13)." We read elsewhere that Pharisees found it offensive that he would dine with "sinners" and outcasts. Tax collectors were not outcast, and they did not represent ritual impurity. Tax collectors were those who violated community welfare: They took from the poor and they gave to Rome. They were not "cast out"; they walked out on their own two feet. And yet, they too are welcome in the center of Jewish practice, the Jerusalem Temple (see Luke 18:10-14).

In a 2014 article in *Sojourners*, we are told that the Pharisees were allied with the Zealots in the first revolt against Rome. Only when the revolution failed did the Pharisees follow, in many ways, "a path more like the one Jesus had taught, and they showed that it wasn't too late for even Pharisees to change." Some Pharisees joined the Zealot party; many others did not. If there were a complete overlap between the two, first-century Jewish historian Josephus would not have described the four Jewish philosophical groupings as Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots.

We read that Pharisees are like "rich and successful people who lived in fancy houses and stepped over their destitute neighbors who slept in the gutters outside their gates! Proud people, who judged, insulted, excluded, avoided, and accused others!"

The article continues: "And who, according to Jesus, was going to heaven? The very people whom the Pharisees despised, deprived, avoided, excluded, and condemned! Heaven's gates opened wide for the poor and destitute ... the sinners, the sick, and the homeless ... even the prostitutes and tax collectors! In other words, all the people the Pharisees were careful to avoid were exactly the ones who would someday be welcomed into heaven! Imagine how this overturning of traditional language of hell must have shocked everyone—multitudes

and Pharisees alike."

This final line makes the common connection between Pharisees and Jews, for it suggests that all Jews—the "multitudes" who hold to the "traditional language of hell," "everyone"—think G-d loves only the wealthy. Anti-Jewish stereotype is full-blown.

I want to be clear. These authors mean well—and most Christians do. However, until we address the fundamental errors of such reconstructions, such bad history and theology will continue. Nor, by the way, are Jews immune to errors about Christianity. There's work to be done on all sides. To end abuse, education is essential. This education for Christians should include knowledge of Jewish history.

WE HAVE MULTIPLE sources—the gospels, Paul's letters, Josephus' writings, the Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbinic literature—from which to reconstruct Pharisaic practice and piety. All the sources are tendentious.

The gospels charge the Pharisees with, among other things, being hypocrites, blind guides, fools, a brood of vipers (a particularly vicious charge: Baby vipers were thought to bite their way out of the mother), full of extortion, greed, and iniquity, and with killing and crucifying and being guilty of all the righteous blood shed since Abel. This hyperbole, typical of first-century polemic, is not objective reporting; it is instead comparable to its modern incarnation: political discourse. Nor is it surprising. The majority of Jews chose not to follow Jesus of Nazareth, but the "traditions of the elders" (see Mark 7:3, 5); the Pharisees, who promoted those traditions, thus represented a major rival to the nascent church.

Paul is proud of his Pharisaic connections (Philippians 3:5), but he says little about them. Josephus, in his works *Jewish War* and *Antiquities*, compares the Pharisees to the Stoic philosophical school. Although the Dead Sea Scrolls do not mention Pharisees by name, the comments about "seekers after smooth things" likely reflect their view of Pharisees: They made things



too easy. The rabbis of the Mishnah and Talmud display interest in matters the other sources connect with Pharisees, such as tithing, purity, and Sabbath observance; we can with caution extrapolate some historical data from their comments.

Despite the difficulties in locating historical Pharisaic views, when we combine these sources, a consistent portrait emerges. Here's what we know, in seven points, about these Jews whom churches traditionally see as representing everything Jesus came to correct, and whom synagogues traditionally see as representing the faithful transmission of our beautiful tradition.

1 **Contrary to the dominant** Christian view, the Pharisees were not generally wealthy. The only Pharisee from whom we have written records, Paul of Tarsus, is a leather worker. Josephus makes clear that he was no fan of the Pharisees, resenting their popular support that he thought should have been given to the priests. "The Pharisees simplify their standard of living, making no concession to luxury," he writes in *Antiquities*. Ironically, in the gospels it is not the Pharisees who are wealthy, but tax collectors such as Zacchaeus and his buddies, Joseph of Arimathea, and the upscale family of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Luke claims that Pharisees are "lovers of money" (16:14), but Luke is engaging in generalized insult. One could claim that all early Christians were lovers of money, given the frequent warnings against this sin in 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Hebrews 1, but that would be uncharitable.

2 **We have no evidence** that Pharisees thought the destitute would be damned and the rich rewarded. Pharisees, as followers of both Torah and the Prophets, recognized that the poor, widows, orphans, and strangers were under divine protection and were to be supported by the community. It is likely their sense of divine justice was one of the reasons why they promulgated the idea of the resurrection: People who suffer in this world will find redemption in the

world to come. Further, Pharisees would not have seen Jesus' beatitudes about the poor, the meek, and the peacemakers as surprising. These teachings come directly from the Judaism that they and Jesus shared (compare Psalm 37:11 with Matthew 5:5).

3 **There is no reason** to presume that suddenly after 70 C.E. Pharisees discovered social justice. A rabbinic text attributes to Jesus' contemporary, Hillel, this summary of his tradition: "What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else; all the rest is commentary; now go and learn" (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 30b-31a).

4 **Pharisees lived among** the people, not apart from them. The term "Pharisee" likely derives from a Hebrew/Aramaic word meaning "separate," although it could derive as well from a term meaning "to interpret." If indicating "separation," we need to determine: separate from what?

There is no indication that the Pharisees separated themselves from fellow Jews. In order to teach them and to set examples for them, they had to be with them. Hillel also wrote, "Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace, and pursuing peace, loving humanity, and bringing them near to the Torah" (*Mishnah, Pirkei Avot* 1.12). Jesus himself notes the Pharisaic interest in bringing others into their movement (Matthew 23:15). Three times in Luke's gospel, Pharisees invite Jesus to dine with them. These invitations suggest an open, rather than closed, group. That they debate with Jesus over how best to follow Torah also suggests engagement rather than aloofness.

The designation may derive from their separation from the Maccabees (see 1 Maccabees 7:12-13, if the Pharisees are connected to the Hasidaeans) or from the Sadducees, a group with whom the Pharisees are antithetically paired in the gospels and in Acts. The term "Pharisee" generally drops out of rabbinic sources, perhaps because the separation from the Sadducees became de facto when the temple, the locus of Sadducean authority, was destroyed in 70 C.E.

5 **Pharisees promoted** the idea that free will was an essential component of creation, although they also recognized divine control. This notion of "compatibilism" underlies the Pharisees' communitarian ethos. Anyone could be a Pharisee; there were no admission fees or membership dues. Josephus tells us in *Antiquities* that the "Pharisees are affectionate to each other and cultivate harmonious relations with the community." It is because of their simplicity of living, their concern for others, and their respect for tradition that Josephus concludes, "they are extremely influential among the townsfolk."

6 **Recognizing that Israel** was a "priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6), Pharisees were a democratizing group that expanded priestly roles from the temple to the home. For the Pharisees, such practices as Sabbath and holiday observance, ritual purity, and tithing were available to all—rich and poor, women and men. Their practices not only enabled Jews to sanctify their bodies and their homes, they were also the means by which Jews celebrated their distinct identity within the Roman imperial context.

7 **Jesus tells his disciples**, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). His point was not to set the bar low, but to raise it so that his followers would be even more righteous than the Pharisees: They were to be perfect (Matthew 5:48).

After two millennia, surely the time has come to stop bearing false witness against Pharisees and their Jewish descendants. Christianity does not need to bear false witness against Judaism in order to proclaim its good news. ■

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From usslave.blogspot.com

The Cost of Discipleship

When Nashville pastors and seminary students took a stand during the civil rights era, their own congregations were often their harshest critics • by ERIN E. TOCKNELL

BORDERED BY strip malls, chain restaurants, and drug stores, four-lane Hillsboro Pike in Nashville, Tenn., carries cars from the Vanderbilt University area out to suburban neighborhoods. Every afternoon, thousands of drivers heading home from the city crest a ridge and pass a long, red-brick church.



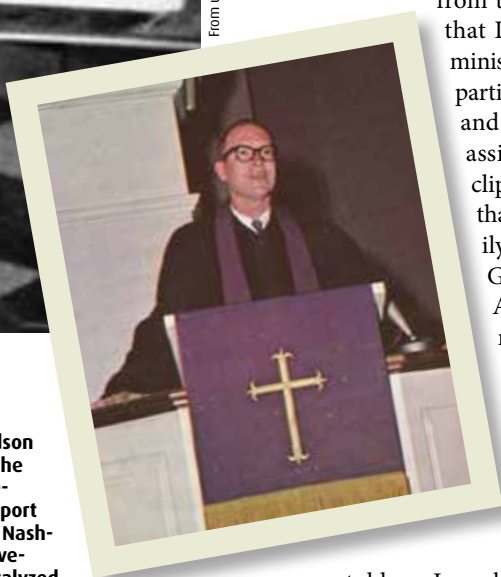
That church, Calvary United Methodist, is where I was confirmed, participated in youth group, and sang in the choir. In the archives room off the education wing, a visitor can open a filing cabinet drawer, flip past photos of youth group retreats and church league basketball games, and find a manila folder labeled “Rev. Dr. Sam Dodson, 1958-1965.”

The folder is thin, but its contents are weighty. A letter to the local Methodist bishop from the church’s board explains that Dodson cannot adequately minister to his congregation while participating in political activities and suggests he be demoted to assistant pastor. A newspaper clipping from 1965 announces that Rev. Dodson and his family will be moving to Athens, Greece, where he will head St. Andrew’s American Church. I recognize some of the names signed to letters calling for Dodson’s demotion—an usher who pressed strawberry candies into my palm whenever I asked, a woman who looked me in the eye when I was 11 and told me I would be a leader in the church someday.

During the months and years immediately

after the relative success of the 1960 sit-ins and before the 1964 Civil Rights Act passed Congress, a wide range of activist groups and individuals in Nashville sought to desegregate restaurants, movie theaters, churches, schools, and recreational facilities, many in predominantly white areas of town. “The ‘Whites Only’ signs were down, but we had not yet seen the white mind behind those signs,” remembered Kwame Leo Lillard, a college student in Nashville in the early ’60s who participated in Freedom Rides to the Deep South to desegregate interstate buses.

Sam Dodson, who passed away in 2002, was one of the leaders of the so-called “clergy movement” in Nashville, an ecumenical and interracial group of clergy and divinity students who participated in desegregation efforts. They faced considerable resistance, not just from hatemongers, but from moderates who feared their congregations would be targeted due to the activism of their ministers and rabbis. These clergy and students were encouraged to separate their religion from



Rev. Sam Dodson helped lead the “clergy movement” to support civil rights in Nashville. The movement was catalyzed by lunch counter sit-ins (above) and other acts of public protest.

Calvary United Methodist Church



Divinity School, did not set out to be an activist. He was assigned to Calvary in 1958, when he was 43. Though Dodson gave sermons supporting the sit-ins and made his views on integration clear from the beginning, the “trouble” did not start until Dodson accepted Gov. Frank Clement’s appointment to chair the Tennessee Human Relations Commission (THRC), which Clement created in 1963 specifically to investigate and propose legislation pertaining to civil rights issues.

“Now, that’s when the Calvary Church became very, very upset,” Dodson’s widow, Helen, who passed away in 2013, told me in a 2006 interview. No one overtly cited racial issues. Instead, the battle was cloaked under concerns that Sam had accepted the post

their politics, but they chose instead to act.

Throughout the early ’60s, black and white students from the Scarritt College for Christian Workers and Vanderbilt Divinity School went to all-white churches on Sunday mornings in the hopes of worshipping together. They were, as Rev. Rosemary Brown recalled, turned away if the black students were dressed in American-style clothes and welcomed if those same students returned wearing African garb. “It was all rooted in the fear that African Americans would actually join the church. It was just so blatant and un-Christlike.”

The white students, along with Dodson and other white clergy, protested whites-only policies at iconic Nashville restaurants such as the Pancake Pantry by what they called “sip-ins.” They filled booths for hours, ordering only coffee and water to slow business.

“I don’t even like coffee anymore,” Brown said as we lunched together at a pizza restaurant located where once stood a grocery store that the movement had protested for its hiring practices. “We had some good lawyers at the time, too,” Brown said. “We told the owner, ‘You have to let everyone eat here. If not, you have to put the words “private club” on the door.’”

People in Nashville who recall these efforts often refer to it as the clergy movement—though the group called itself “The

Committee on Religion and Race” in at least one document. Truth is, very few working clergy could afford to be activists. It was simply too risky to their careers and their congregations.

“The Methodist Church in Nashville was not committed to integration—it was not. I was the black sheep of the church,” said Rev. Bill Barnes, a lifelong Nashville activist who pastored the all-white Carroll Street Methodist Church until 1965 and then took on the role of creating and supporting Edgehill Methodist, the city’s first interracial Methodist congregation. There were, Barnes recalled, only four full-time clergy who led marches, called for integration of churches, and joined sip-ins at segregated restaurants—Rabbi Randall Falk, Father Thomas Duffy, Rev. Kelly Miller Smith (of the prominent African-American congregation First Baptist Church Capitol Hill), and Rev. Dodson. “The divinity school was a big piece. And Sam [Dodson] really couldn’t do as much as the others. His congregation gave him a lot of grief,” said Barnes.

“They loved Sam,” remembered Brown, who was also an assistant at Calvary, “But Sam scared ’em. He scared ’em because they didn’t know if the church would be bombed. That was happening, you know.”

DODSON, BORN IN tiny Hampshire, Tenn., and educated at Vanderbilt and Yale

without consulting the church board.

Dodson drafted legislation and ran meetings with the THRC, even as he continued to preach his always-12-minute sermons at Calvary every Sunday. Some church members protested, some left and started a new church, and many settled into an uneasy truce, willing to wait out their minister’s involvement in activism.

Then came the events of May 5, 1964. Frustrated over the slow pace of change from city hall, the clergy movement decided to march through downtown—an effort they called “The Ministers’ Witness to Human Rights.”

“That march was just, ‘Why don’t we all walk together and show them that we can walk together?’” remembered Rev. Brown.

With Dodson, Smith, Falk, and Duffy leading the way, about 150 clergy and students, both black and white, marched to city hall and presented a document to Mayor Beverly Briley. The document complimented the mayor on the racial progress that had been made thus far and made four additional demands: the immediate desegregation of all grades in all public schools, the passage of a public accommodations ordinance to ensure complete access to all public places for all citizens, full access to recreational facilities, and equal employment opportunities in city government.



Facing page: A group of religious leaders march for human rights in Nashville on May 5, 1964. Rabbi Randall Falk (far left), Diane Nash, and Rev. Kelly Miller Smith were leaders of the Nashville movement.

"It is for recognition and attainment of these basic human rights that Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish [clergy] have joined on Tuesday, May 5, 1964, in a Ministers' Witness through the downtown area of the city of Nashville ... We pursue these goals in fulfillment of our obligation as interpreters of Judeo-Christian heritage which 'Proclaims liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof' in the name of the One God of all."

According to a newspaper account of the day, Mayor Briley responded with the somewhat vague rhetoric of an elected official in a moderate town, telling the ministers, "I shall proceed to carry out the laws as they are given to me." The march is barely a footnote in Nashville history books, but at the time newspaper wire services picked up the story. Letters of support and derision poured in to the congregations from around the country. At Congregation Ohabai Shalom, where Falk was rabbi, police apprehended angry citizens as they made their way onto the grounds. "There were overt threats," Paul Cohn remembered. "It was everything you all [Christians] had, in spades. We were afraid [Rabbi Falk] was a lightning rod to attract violence. But he was speaking from a moral conviction. He was fearless and steadfast in his principles."

For Dodson, the fallout after the march was complete and life-altering. The bulk of the hate mail was sent in May and June of that year. The Calvary Church board attempted to demote him shortly thereafter, and the Dodson family moved to Greece a year later.

Of all the mail I read, one letter stands out. A Calvary member wrote Dodson decrying not just the fact that he had been marching and going to meetings, but that he had left a church picnic to do so. Ministers, she said, should tend to their flocks first and deal with "personal," political matters later. What's more, she wrote, "I was sorry to see you leading the parade [as she called the march]. I think it would have been much better to

protest 'Printer's Alley,'" a slightly seedy stretch of jazz bars and night clubs downtown.

Many of the letters were hateful, but many more took on a question we recognize in contemporary debates—to what extent should the church involve itself in civic life? Dodson

Clergy who participated in desegregation efforts faced considerable resistance from moderates in their congregations.

never wavered in his belief that he was morally obligated to work toward true integration. He never ceased his attempts to bring his congregation along that same path.

"Sam was in his time," said his granddaughter Karin Dodson-Gignoux. "You are confronted and then you respond. That is what Sam did. I think he knew pretty well there would be repercussions."

Bill Barnes, who was forced out of his own church shortly after Dodson left Calvary, summed up his own activism: "It's 'God so loved the world,' not 'God so loved the church.' It's not a question of politics vs. religion. It's a question of the moral tenor of the world we live in."

DODSON STAYED at Calvary for a year after the march. During those months, the Civil Rights Act passed and the Voting Rights Act gathered the momentum it would need to become reality in August 1965. Though

a long battle over school desegregation remained, the legal tide had turned, Jim Crow finally loosened its stranglehold over the city, and public opinion showed the faintest hints of a coming sea change. After *The Tennessean* printed a story about the Dodsons' planned departure for Greece in spring 1965, letters of support began pouring in.

"You will be missed in Nashville.

Your willingness to stand up for what you believe made your ministry here a constructive one."

"I still believe Calvary should be the church in this conservative town to stand on the hill and be the 'beacon' of the future. You have started us in the right way."

Reconciliation, however, requires more than kind notes, and racial progress requires an acknowledgement of the deep pain of racism.

For decades, the story of the clergy movement and Dodson's activism was forgot-

ten or ignored, particularly at the church that had been his home. Gradually since the early 2000s, some have pulled this story into the light. Church members who left because of Dodson have returned and apologized. After Dodson's death in 2002, he was eulogized on the front page of the church paper.

In 2013, a committee at Calvary set to work on a permanent memorial to Dodson's work and courage. Thanks to its efforts, the story of Dodson, the Tennessee Commission on Human Relations, and the Ministers' Witness has escaped from the filing cabinet. A colorful timeline and display is now mounted on the wall outside the senior pastor's office. Written in script across the top are the words "Dr. Rev. Samuel R. Dodson, Jr.: Man of Courage." ■

Erin E. Tocknell is the author of Confederate Streets and teaches high school literature and writing in Chattanooga, Tenn.



“Money must be the sacrament of friendship

The Old Man and the

-note

102-year-old priest Arturo Paoli is perhaps the most important economist you've never heard of • by MARK V. EWERT

IN THE LARGEST currency change that the world has ever seen, the euro was launched on New Year's Day 2002 with great excitement and ceremony in 12 eurozone member countries. At the time, the shared currency was considered to be a vehicle for tying together separate states and cultures with numerous economic benefits, particularly to trade, employment, and tourism.

Now imagine a humble, 90-year-old Catholic priest, vibrant yet shrunken and bent with age. In Italian, he addresses a group about the euro in the celebratory year of its launch. In one hand he holds up an unconsecrated host; in the other, a one-euro coin. They are the same shape, and nearly the same size. But the coin is shiny silver and gold. The priest speaks simply and directly about how, despite their similar appearance and promise of life enrichment, the euro is deceptive. The dominance of finance and capitalism that it supports is a false idol, he says, which leads to addiction.

This story was recounted by a number of Italian press outlets at the time. It contributes to the mythos of this man who writes extensively about the Eucharist, which he believes, in contrast to the euro, creates a relationship not just with God but with our fellow human beings.

Photos by Davide Duto

and not of division."

—Father Arturo Paoli



“When it circulates fairly, money distributes justice.”

That priest is Arturo Paoli, now 102 years old and still quite active.

After spending most of his life overseas, Father Paoli returned to his native Italy in 2005 and lives in Lucca. Despite being a prominent activist, writer, and thinker in Catholic circles for nearly 70 years, he is largely unknown in the English-speaking world. (I am aware of only three of his 50 books having been translated into English: *Freedom to be Free* [1973], *Meditations on Saint Luke* [1977], and *Gather Together in My Name* [1987]. Of Paoli's countless articles and public addresses, only rough web translations are available.)

In a way, this is not surprising. Since Paoli's earliest years as a priest in the 1940s, he has worked on the ground for the disenfranchised; organizing, fighting for better living conditions, and caring directly for the most vulnerable. He played a behind-the-scenes role at the grassroots of the Latin American liberation theology movement. He never climbed in the Catholic hierarchy and was often ostracized by the Vatican.

In *Being Generous: The Art of Right Living*, authors Lucinda Vardey and John Dalla Costa cite Paoli as saying that money links us together in community, that money is a symbol of life and a symbol of justice, and that “when it circulates fairly, providing wages commensurate with effort, and making available equitably priced goods, money distributes justice.” They say that Paoli calls money “grace, by which he means that it is a means for individuals to exchange goodness.”

Money: False Idol or Vehicle of Grace?

HOW CAN MONEY be a false idol, mammon, the source of greed, and an instrument of oppression—while at the same time a means of “grace,” a binding agent for community, and a tool for justice?

In *Freedom to be Free*, Paoli writes extensively about capitalism and how it affects both rich and poor. Capitalism, he says, is inherently atheistic. It creates profound alienation and insecurity. For Paoli, this theme of security and insecurity “is very relevant today because capitalism makes [people] insecure. People who are hungry for calories are insecure about tomorrow. They continually ask themselves if there will be work tomorrow and health enough to work and sufficient money to continue to have what their family

needs. People hungry for ideals suffer from the insecurity of futility. They see all things and themselves in the midst of losing substance. It is the anguish of nothingness.”

More recently, Paoli has added to his critique of capitalism by decrying globalization and its proliferation of injustice in our current economic systems. The globalized economic system does two harmful things, in Paoli's view. First, it allows money to accumulate in the hands of a few, who hide behind the anonymous front of the banking world. He has spoken of capital as an independent actor, free to move about the world without a passport, reason, or concern for the condition of people. So the wealthy can be disconnected from the needs of people in their own communities. Second, money in this system creates an unquenchable, selfish desire for accumulation, where we become addicted to its false promises of our personal betterment.

Paoli is clear that poverty is caused by human beings. Human societies and policies are created by men and women. We are responsible for the society in which we live—and by extension for each other.

Life and Liberation

SHORTLY AFTER HIS 1940 ordination, Paoli experienced the atrocities of the Nazi military. He joined the resistance movement and worked to save the lives of Italian Jews, for which he was awarded the highest recognition available to a non-Jew by Israel and the gold medal for civil valor by the Italian government.

After the war, Paoli spent time in Argentina, and then at age 40 joined a Catholic order called the Little Brothers of the Gospel. On his return to Italy in 1957, Paoli began working with coal miners on the Italian island of Sardinia, which led him to found a solidarity organization to improve their living and working conditions. The Vatican, fearing his radicalism and political activity, pressured him to take work that was as far from Rome as possible. In 1959, Paoli left again for Argentina, where he once again found himself organizing manual laborers.

In 1969, Paoli became regional superior of the Latin American community of the Little Brothers and moved near Buenos Aires. Jorge Mario Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, was ordained that year in Buenos Aires, and the

two priests reportedly knew each other.

In Buenos Aires, Paoli developed his ideas about what he called “committed theology,” which advocated solidarity with the poor and organizing to improve their living conditions. His thinking arose concurrently with the ideas of other South American religious leaders, who later launched the movement known as liberation theology.

Paoli moved from Buenos Aires in 1971 to a rural mining community, where he once again helped to create a miners' union and worker cooperative. Paoli was publicly accused of arms dealing by Argentina's Peron dictatorship and named on a public assassination list. To escape threats on his life, Paoli moved to Venezuela and later to Brazil, where he again organized lay workers.

‘Do Not Become a “Mimic” of the Poor’

PAOLI WRITES ABOUT the rich and the poor as two distinct groups. The poor are those that live close to the ground and each other, with few creature comforts. Who are the rich—“the bourgeois,” as Paoli describes them? They are rich in possessions, yet inclined to a poverty of spirit. He writes, They are the “ones who don't stand in line. The ones who make an appointment with the dentist, the lawyer, or the psychologist for a certain time.” These people can have a “bourgeois way of looking at Jesus. This is the ‘private’ Jesus—the one at your disposal.”

Christ does not have the bourgeois at his service, says Paoli, rather the opposite. “This bourgeois view gives the appearance of respecting the divinity of Christ, but ... it actually relegates him to a sphere that is several removes from the world of human beings, so that the majority of Christians do not know that Jesus was concerned with liberation, equality among persons, justice, or anything else of major importance for your daily life,” Paoli warns in *Gather In My Name*.

Paoli does not call people to literal poverty; instead, to discover God, each one must divest herself of what alienates her or seeks to rule her identity. This identification can prevent us from entering into deep human relationships with one other. Paoli calls this simply “making friends.”

He speaks of horizontal relationships, between equals, rather than vertical ones, between the rich and the poor: “Making friends’ means to look in one's use of

possessions for a horizontal relationship, because the vertical one, directed from the higher to the lower, necessarily provokes an aggressive response.” He adds, in *Freedom to be Free*, “The poor man can give alms to the poor, the rich man cannot. He would be causing harm.”

Paoli warns people who are not poor from being “mimics.” He says, “Someone who is not poor and is invited by this mysterious voice to leave everything ought not to think that he can become a poor man, because he would be playing a role and would be making a complete mistake. In this case poverty would not be this person; it would be a chosen companion, a suit of clothes he wears.”

Paoli recommends that one “give of oneself, to lose the self in order to grow and to rediscover the self.” Paoli warns that this is different from taking on a false mantle of poverty: “One cannot make oneself poor. [One] can only empty [oneself] to the roots of [his or her] being and therefore achieve that powerlessness, that interior poverty, which is then reflected externally as the love of essentiality, as a profound security that is not self-security. It is a rediscovery of things anchored in God, in Being, and therefore gives human hope a new dimension.”

Paoli adds, “When you’ve encountered Jesus, and entered into communication with him, you get rid of a mountain of concerns—how to dress, how to get a motorcycle, how to buy a record player. Everything is absorbed into one concern and one desire: that famous reign of God.”

A Fresh Breeze From the Vatican

UNTIL RECENTLY, the Vatican was critical of many core aspects of liberation theology. Catholic leaders were suspended, writing was censored, and people were even excommunicated for their more radical political stances rooted in concepts of liberation theology.

In September 2013, however, there was a private meeting in Rome between Pope Francis and liberation theologian Father Gustavo Gutiérrez. The Vatican is now also in the process of canonizing El Salvador’s Archbishop Oscar Romero. Taken together, these events signal a softening of the Vatican’s stance on liberation theology under Pope Francis, who is more familiar and comfortable with the language of liberation.

Early in 2014, Paoli was invited to the



Arturo Paoli

papal residence to join Pope Francis in a private and lengthy audience. It certainly seemed like a homecoming for Paoli, where the ideas he has developed over a lifetime now are embraced by the Vatican—and he is welcomed, still as a humble priest, by the pope himself.

PAOLI BELIEVES THAT money itself can be transformed through our own conversion to deeper “friendship.” We must be a friend to one another, Paoli writes, and not a friend of money: “Money must be the sacrament of friendship and not of division, the maker of peace and not of war.”

In this reframing, money can be the very instrument to heal what it has broken. “Money, which is a symbol of things in history, is an instrument of divisiveness and must become an instrument of fellowship, a vehicle of friendship rather than an instrument of war. This demands a community in production, in distribution, and in consumption,” he writes. In this, poverty itself is redefined: “There emerges a view of money as a symbol of union and not of division. A

new view of poverty is also born, which is no longer the classical idea, synonymous with indigence, but rather the renunciation of personal interests in order to achieve a friendship that is understood as co-creation.”

Finally, Paoli comes back to the symbols of the coin and the host held high. If money can serve friendship rather than alienation, then it can be transformed to be the very vehicle of communion. When consumption, he writes, “which is our most violent act—is not destructive and violent, but rather a respectful communion with things, it is transformed into a eucharistic act, that is, thanksgiving.”

This conversion of economies and holy use of money is an enormous challenge at all levels, from the personal to the systemic. Yet it is also inspiring and visionary. At 102 years old, Arturo Paoli continues this practice of “friendship,” in humility and ultimate faithfulness to the teachings of Christ. ■

Mark V. Ewert, author of *The Generosity Path*, is a nonprofit leadership coach and stewardship consultant for religious organizations. He lives in Washington, D.C.

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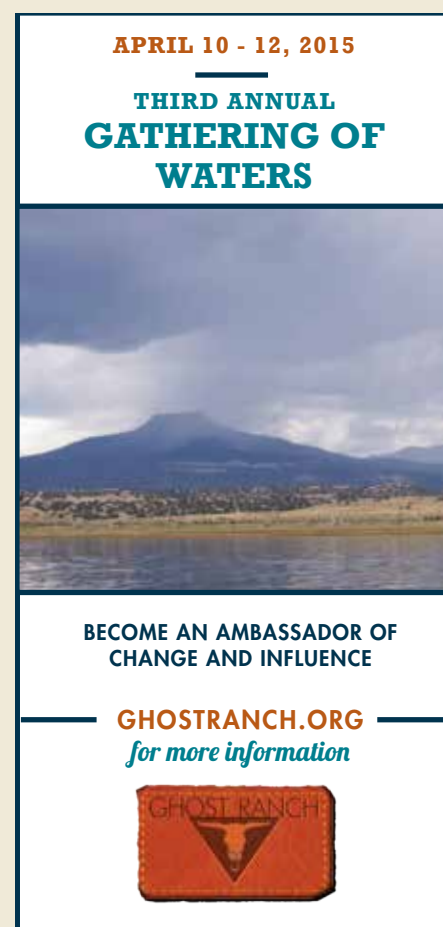
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By Julie Polter

Were You **There?**

How art can help us wrestle with race and brokenness.

THE GRAINY, STUTTERING surveillance footage shows police milling about, offering no medical assistance to the 12-year-old boy, Tamir Rice, one of them has just shot. They only spring into action when the boy's older sister runs into the frame toward her brother. An officer tackles the girl, knocking her back in the snow, then cuffs her and puts her in the patrol car, only a few feet from her dead or dying brother.

This extended footage, released in January, and bystander cell phone footage from a few minutes later with audio of the sister wailing over and over "they killed my brother," brought into my head the Good Friday spiritual "Were You There?" It was another moment, in months of unrest over police killings of black adults and children, when the question pressed in on me as a white person. "Were you there? Were you there when they choked my father dead? Were you there when they shot my son? Were you there when they killed my brother? Were you there?"

Mano Africa/Getty Images

44 New Hopes, Old Realities

Michelle A. Gonzalez on Leonardo Boff's latest

45 Fueled by Faith, Not Fear

Luan Huska reviews *Doing Good Without Giving Up*

46 Saints and Nomads

Jenna Barnett on Marilynne Robinson's *Lila*

to arrive, you hear one say to the other that being around black people is like watching a foreign film without translation.

The more deadly consequences are explored in the poem-scripts for "Situation" video essays she produces with her photographer husband, John Lucas—on topics such as Hurricane Katrina, Trayvon Martin, the 2011 hate-crime killing of James Craig Anderson, and racial profiling ("And you are not the guy and still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description.").

Citizen, a 2014 National Book Award finalist for poetry, evokes the double weight

Rankine assembles a calmly devastating case against the myth of a "post-racial America."

of daily encounters with racial prejudice—the weariness of accumulating small psychic cuts, indignities, and deaths multiplied by a dominant culture that doesn't believe they are real.

Rankine assembles a calmly devastating case against the myth of a "post-racial America." Art and news images referenced in her poems are scattered throughout the book—a photo of Danish tennis player Caroline Wozniacki, blonde and grinning, towels stuffed into her top and shorts in mockery of Serena Williams, is particularly cringe-inducing. Several of the powerful "Situation" video essays are viewable at Claudiarankine.com.

JASIRI X is a Pittsburgh-based hip-hop artist, community activist, and founding member of the anti-violence group One Hood. His track "Strange Fruit (Class of 2013)" is in memory of Renisha McBride and Jonathan Ferrell, killed in separate incidents seeking help after car accidents, and Kendrick Johnson, a teenager who died under mysterious circumstances in his high school gym, with incompetence or intentional cover-up marring the investigation. Jasiri X challenges mainstream

Continued on Page 43

While books and other cultural works are no substitute or shortcut to the spiritual work of true repentance and detoxifying from cheap grace, they can be means of deepening understanding and finding the resolve to take action. Along with the film *Selma*, following are some of the artistic resources I'm turning to this Lent.

Jamaican-born poet Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Graywolf Press) is a brilliant and disturbing extended meditation on being black in the United States. She builds on short scenes of the offhanded racism she has experienced in the supposedly liberal and genteel middle-class academic world:

Standing outside the conference room, unseen by the two men waiting for the others

New & Noteworthy



SOULFUL PROTEST

R&B singer D'Angelo ends a 14-year hiatus with the album *Black Messiah*, on which he sings of prayer, love lost, climate change, race, and violence. He asks, "In a world where we all circle the fiery sun / with a need for love / what have we become?" RCA

BELIEF AND UNBELIEF EXPLORED

In *Faith: Essays From Believers, Agnostics, and Atheists*, edited by Victoria Zackheim, 22 renowned, religiously diverse authors explain their beliefs. Authors use true stories about tarot cards, romance, insomnia, robots, loss, and mystical experiences to answer the question, "What do I believe?" Atria Books

NO RELEASE

A short documentary from the Center for Constitutional Rights, "Waiting for Fahd," tells the story of CCR client Fahd Ghazy, a Yemeni national unlawfully detained at Guantánamo since he was 17 (he is now 30). Despite being twice cleared for release, he continues to be held because of his nationality. ccrjustice.org/fahd



THE JESUS WE DIDN'T KNOW

Historian and novelist James Carroll's latest nonfiction work, *Christ Actually: The Son of God for the Secular Age*, explores how separating Jesus from his Jewish identity (and the resultant anti-Semitism) has distorted Christianity. Who might Jesus be for Christians going forward? Viking

Time for a Cyberweapons Treaty?

MANY QUESTIONS remain about the alleged North Korean hacking of Sony Pictures and the U.S. response. But the Christmas controversy, apparently triggered by the Seth Rogen-James Franco satire film *The Interview*, has made one thing perfectly clear: A lot has changed on the internet since Al Gore didn't invent it.

Back in the days of Gore, the net was an attempt to provide a secure and resilient military communications network during our Cold War with the Soviet Union. But by the turn of this century, it had become an unrivaled public forum for democratic activism and an absolute paradise for shoppers and porn addicts. Now the internet is getting back to its military roots. It is both the weapon and the battleground for United States' simmering low-level wars with not



As the Stuxnet sabotage of industrial centrifuges demonstrated, monkeying with the software can cause real damage in the physical world. Someone could take out our electric power in a similar fashion, wreaking widespread chaos and death. And we could do that to some other hap-

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less people whose government ours dislikes.

So, two big lessons from the Sony hacking: First, everyone everywhere needs to stop writing stuff in workplace emails that they aren't willing to see published. And second, the U.S. needs to pull back from its commitment to offensive cyberwar. Instead we should begin an international arms control process for cyberweaponry like the one that has helped avert another use of nuclear weapons for the past 69 years.

In response to the Snowden revelations on offensive cyberwar, internet security expert Bruce Schneier wrote, "We're pursuing policies that are both expensive and destabilizing and aren't making the internet any safer. ... We're ignoring resilience in favor of offense. ... It's time to stop the madness. Yes, our military needs to invest in cyberwar capabilities, but we also need international rules of cyberwar, more transparency from our own government on what we are and are not doing, international cooperation between governments, and viable cyberweapons treaties." ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.

Cyberwar stories were uninteresting until one involved a threat to our inalienable right to laugh at fart jokes.

only North Korea, but China, Iran, Russia, and anyone else who gets in the way.

For several years there has been a steady trickle of back-page news stories about cyberwarfare. The Chinese military seemed to be hacking U.S. government and business sites for military and industrial espionage. Two years ago the Chinese were said to have hacked *The New York Times* in revenge for that paper's reporting on the financial corruption of China's leadership. North Korea has allegedly attacked banking networks in South Korea. Attacks said to originate in Russia have hit U.S. and European energy companies. In 2009, the ante was upped

when the U.S. and Israel unleashed the Stuxnet virus to sabotage the Iranian nuclear program. The virus destroyed Iranian centrifuges, but it also escaped to the broader internet and sabotaged computers at the U.S.-based Chevron oil company.

Stuxnet was just the beginning. According to a document released by Edward Snowden, reported in *The Guardian*, in October 2012

President Obama issued a secret policy directive ordering U.S. agencies to develop strategies and targets for Offensive Cyber Effects Operations. In the future, Obama ordered,

the U.S. should take the offensive in using internet-based hacking and sabotage "to advance U.S. national objectives around the world."

ALL THESE CYBERWAR stories were arcane and uninteresting for most people, until one came along that involved celebrity gossip, revelations of Hollywood racism, and a potential threat to our inalienable American right to spend Christmas laughing at fart jokes. Then we got a round-the-clock frenzy of media-induced irrational fear.

But a healthy fear of cyberwar is not irrational.



Continued from Page 41

rappers and black leaders for being more concerned with money and fame than these deaths—but begins and ends with a broader indictment: “Another Black body lynched is not unique to us” and “Strange fruit but now they cock and aim shoot yeah.” The video ends with Jasiri X holding up *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Twin Palm Publishers; withoutsanctuary.org), a collection of images made as souvenirs of mob violence during the Jim Crow era.

As Rankine writes, “The world is wrong. You can’t put the past behind you. It’s buried in you; it’s turned your flesh into its own cupboard.”

LAWYER BRYAN Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) in Montgomery, Ala., has spent his career working with those who have been denied fair treatment in the criminal justice system because of poverty and race: death row prisoners, the mentally disabled, poor women, those given life sentences while still children. In *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (Spiegel & Grau), Stevenson, who has rightly gained internet fame from a powerful TED talk about his life’s work, brings you in close to outrageous travesties against people with little or no means of defense, trapped in a “costly nightmare” of mass incarceration. He focuses especially on the story of Walter McMillian, a black Alabama man sent to death row on the basis of false accusations; Stevenson and EJI eventually get him freed.

Stevenson offers an eloquent analysis of how our justice system has gone bad, infused with insights relevant for anyone wrestling with despair, injustice, and complicity. “My clients were broken by mental illness, poverty, and racism. ... In their broken state, they were judged and condemned by people whose commitment to fairness had been broken by cynicism, hopelessness, and prejudice. ... I’m broken too.” But he hopes this might make us hunger for mercy and reform: “[I]f we acknowledged our brokenness, we could no longer take pride in mass incarceration, in executing people, in our deliberate indifference to the most vulnerable.” And he testifies to the “traces of hope and humanity” that linger in many condemned and incarcerated people, “seeds of restoration that come to



From *Selma*, the movie

MOVED, OR MOVED TO ACT?

FOR TWO YEARS in a row we have seen significant films about oppression and struggle nurture public consciousness. *Selma* and *12 Years a Slave* invite us to reimagine iconic moments closer than we usually think, their protagonists more like us. Slavery had not been portrayed in such visceral fashion in a mainstream film before *12 Years*. Before *Selma*, images of Martin Luther King Jr. had never quite transcended the almost superhuman projections that accrue from his martyrdom and decades of being co-opted by cultural mavens from Apple to Glenn Beck.

These films create new benchmarks for the mainstream depiction of black history, black struggle, and wider perceptions. But entertaining portrayals of inspiration contain a powerfully dangerous substance that needs to be handled with care. The cathartic tears shed at a film about other people’s suffering and heroism can also be a narcotic, implying that the work has been done. Think of all the talk about freedom struggles after *Braveheart*, or challenging the principalities and powers after *The Matrix*. The problem was, most of it was just that. Talk.

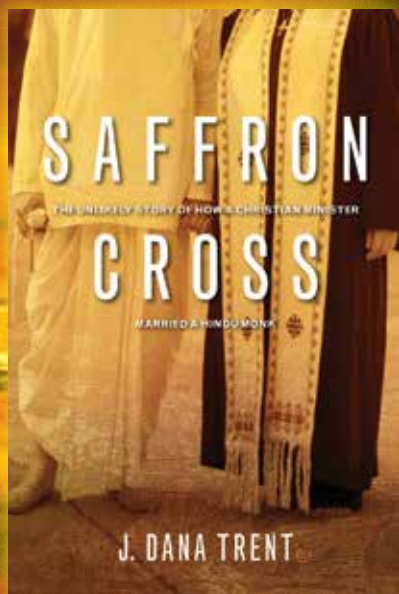
Countercultural critic Armond White suggests that the danger of such films is that viewers “are encouraged to profess an inheritance they do not earn”—watching *Selma* is not the same thing as participation in social struggle. This is a problem, not just for the personal integrity of

audiences, but for the world, because *feeling* something is not the same thing as *doing* something. *Schindler’s List* swept the Oscars in 1994, where speeches invoked the plea that “never again” should genocide be permitted. It was only days before the Rwandan genocide began.

Selma is being released when public consciousness about the roots of injustice is high. We are beginning to understand that we need to look back in order to look forward honestly (some could never forget this in the first place). We are beginning to understand that those of us who benefit from white supremacy need to make restoration for our privilege and the fruits of the subjugation of others—and that those of us who struggle for our own freedom need to tell our stories loud and clear. These films can empower that process, or they can be used to pretend to ourselves that the journey is done.

The best thing about *Selma* is its depiction of MLK as a human being, gifted, to be sure, but who most distinguished himself from the rest of us by making the decision to act. His legacy can be only partly honored by the experience of watching *Selma*. The journey continues when the audience starts acting. ■

Gareth Higgins, a northern Irish writer, curates www.moviesandmeaning.com and www.soultelegram.com, newsletters of film recommendations and spirituality writing.



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astounding life when nurtured by very simple interventions.”

Finally, incorporating awareness of the civil rights movement and the legacy of Jim Crow with a child’s growing sense of self and her creative gifts, is the 2014 National Book Award winner for young people’s literature, *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Nancy Paulsen Books/ Penguin Group). Jacqueline Woodson’s memoir in free verse of growing up as an African-American girl in the 1960s and ’70s gives a child’s-eye view on divorce and death, an uncle’s imprisonment, a loving family, and the TV news:

*Angela Davis smiles, gap-toothed and beautiful,
raises her fist in the air
says, Power to the people, looks out
from the television
directly into my eyes.*

JAMES H. CONE writes in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* that African Americans “found in the cross the spiritual power to resist the violence they so often suffered.” May this Lenten season be one where we all look clearly at the brokenness of our souls and our systems—and cultivate a new commitment to mercy, justice, and resistance. ■

Julie Polter is a senior associate editor of Sojourners.

Reviewed by Michelle A. Gonzalez

NEW HOPES AND OLD REALITIES IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Francis of Rome and Francis of Assisi: A New Springtime for the Church,
by Leonardo Boff. Orbis Books.

LEONARDO BOFF’S *Francis of Rome and Francis of Assisi: A New Springtime for the Church* offers intriguing portraits of the current bishop of Rome and the saint that is his namesake. The book provides an introduction to these two extraordinary figures and includes a brief overview of the papacy, tracing how the office of the bishop of Rome eventually became the infallible pope.

The Roman Catholic Church depicted through Boff’s eyes is a church in crisis, reeling from the Vatican Bank and clergy sex abuse scandals. The institution and leadership have lost credibility in the eyes of many and the Roman curia is in need of reform. Yet this crisis is tempered by the election of Jorge Mario Bergoglio as pope, which for Boff fuels a tangible optimism for the church’s future.

Both men in these pages are called to the work of reform. Francis of Assisi’s conversion began when he heard a crucifix in a small church say, “Francis, go and restore

my house, because it is in ruins.” Boff depicts Pope Francis as receiving a similar call, to reform the church so that it becomes a church that is poor, emphasizing humility and charity. Boff raises both men as models of living with the poor and like the poor, citing the now famous example of Francis going to pay his hotel bill after being elected pope.

Boff heavily contrasts Pope Francis to John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and is especially critical of the latter’s judgment on ecclesial issues. Boff presents Francis as a voice from the periphery. He is. And yet we must remember that Pope Francis was a cardinal of Italian descent from Argentina, a nation that often identifies itself more as European than American.

For Boff, Francis represents hope and embodies a new openness in the Catholic Church. His use of “Bishop of Rome” as his primary title rejects the elitism previously associated with the papacy. His refusal to live in the Apostolic Palace, instead living in a guesthouse, represents his desire to be in community, as does his pastoral outreach. Francis is a symbol of an inclusive church on the side of the poor that is ready to engage the modern world and the religious diversity that exists within it. This vision is grounded in the concrete life and teachings of the historical Jesus. Boff describes Francis as a pope that is not Euro-centric, Vatican-centric, ecclesio-centric, papal-centric, or conservative.

After concluding Boff’s book I could not help but wonder how much of the real Pope Francis is in its pages and how much of it represents Boff’s hopes for what Pope Francis symbolizes for his theological worldview. It was almost surreal to read a book by a Latin American liberation theologian that is optimistic about the papacy. I appreciate that the book emerges from the concrete moment of the church’s World Youth Day celebration in Rio de Janeiro in 2013. I agree with his claim that the new pope does not need to embrace the term “liberation theology,” but only needs to put the liberation of the oppressed at the center of the church. Actions are much more important than academic categories.

However, I am not as optimistic as Boff. A recent Pew study demonstrates that Latino/as and Latin Americans are leaving the Roman Catholic Church in increasing numbers; I am not sure the “Francis effect”

will cause a significant return to Catholicism. While I appreciate that Pope Francis has dramatically changed the papacy’s tone to signal a more open and welcoming church, the teachings, rituals, and theology of Roman Catholicism remain untouched and, in my opinion, stagnant. Boff concludes his book by calling for a new council to address the Catholic Church in light of what Francis’ papacy represents. Perhaps if Boff’s dream

is realized, we will one day have the type of church that he depicts in his book. We can only hope. ■

Michelle A. Gonzalez is associate professor of religious studies at the University of Miami. Her books include Sor Juana: Beauty and Justice in the Americas and Created in God’s Image: An Introduction to Feminist Theological Anthropology.

Reviewed by Luan Huska

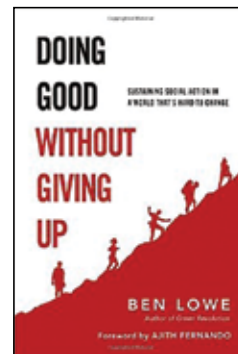
FUELED BY FAITH, NOT FEAR

***Doing Good Without Giving Up: Sustaining Social Action in a World That’s Hard to Change*, by Ben Lowe. IVP Books.**

THE LAST THING that Ben Lowe could be accused of is “slacktivism,” which, as he describes in his latest book, *Doing Good Without Giving Up*, happens when we complain and point fingers about justice issues while being slow to take constructive action to address the situation.

From running for Congress at age 25 to helping to ignite a grassroots student environmental movement, Lowe’s track record for tackling complex and thorny problems where others would throw up their hands is remarkable. Even more remarkable is that after nearly a decade of such work, Lowe retains a gracious hope and steadfast sense of calling, despite being told by other Christians that he was being deceived by the devil, weathering bouts of burnout and depression, and continually facing entrenched systemic problems. This is why I trust him when he writes to encourage those of us whose hearts are heavy for the injustices in the world but often find ourselves stuck in the initial “slacktivist” inertia or dragged down later by opposition, burnout, and cynicism.

In *Doing Good*, Lowe outlines a sustainable impetus for social action and offers practices to sustain ongoing activism. We cannot be motivated by the desire to see



“Shame on those who stoke our fears to prey and profit off of us!”

dramatic change, he says, because this only “points people to ourselves and idolizes the change we seek.” It also ultimately lacks staying power. Instead, Lowe calls us to pursue faithfulness in our social action, which “points people to Christ ... and is ultimately the best—if not only—way to bring about the change God seeks.” Staying faithful, which

the second half of the book covers, requires a continual reorientation to Christ as center through such practices as repentance, Sabbath, contemplation, and community.

Doing Good is practical and balanced. Rather than promote airy ideals, Lowe peppers flesh-and-blood examples and specific action steps throughout every section.

To bring down to earth Walter Brueggemann’s definition of prophecy as “offering an alternative perception of reality,” for instance, he tells how he and his neighbors mobilized to prevent the displacement by a village redevelopment plan of many vulnerable families in their low-income apartment complex. They acted prophetically, showing village leaders that their neighborhood was not just a potential site for more tax revenue but a web of life- and hope-giving relationships.

Lowe’s graciousness with those at

different points than him on the political and theological spectrum is impressive. Though it would be easy in such a book to bemoan religious conservatives for their role in recent political stymies around justice issues, he instead commends the good many of them *have* done in practically caring for the poor, incarcerated, homeless, and more. On the topic of opposition, Lowe encourages listening and reflection, reminding us that “those who oppose us are likely not completely wrong, and we are rarely completely right.” This kind of unassuming and even-handed approach is a cup of cold water in our current desert of political polarization.

While gracious, Lowe is not afraid to call

out evil. My favorite line of the book is his indictment of the fear-mongers of our generation who seek to keep us chained to comfort and complacency instead of living out God’s kingdom on earth. They feed us a steady diet of fear—“fear of terrorists, Muslims, socialists, immigrants, homosexuals, the poor, and the list goes on.” In response, Lowe writes, “Shame on those who stoke our fears to prey and profit off of us!”

Doing Good is a refreshing rejoinder to our culture of fear, sounding instead a call for faithful social action grounded in a love that casts out all fears. ■

Liuan Huska is a writer in the Chicago area.

Reviewed by Jenna Barnett

SAINTS AND NOMADS

Lila: A Novel, by Marilynne Robinson. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

MARILYNNE ROBINSON'S

Lila is the love story we thought we already knew, but didn't. *Lila* takes us back to Gilead, Iowa, the same setting as Robinson's novels *Gilead* and *Home*, describing the backstory and courtship of old Rev. Ames and the much younger Lila from a completely new point of view.

In *Gilead*, Ames describes his immediate, unlikely love for Lila, the hard-working wanderer. But Ames' description of the *feeling* of love is more vivid than his description of the woman he loves.

The reverse is true in *Lila*. We learn Lila's story through thick third-person prose. Robinson's narration often reflects Lila's stream of consciousness—a scattered, questioning pattern of thought, apt for a woman digesting the idea of small-town permanency after an exciting, scary, shame-filled life on the road. In the novel's opening scene, Lila is just a small child, neglected and dying on the front steps of her house.



Doll, a loving and hardened itinerant, kidnaps her just in time. It's unclear if Doll stole or saved Lila. We can't ever be sure. Either way, her love for Lila is fierce, and Lila comes to depend on it as they travel around the country, living off of door-to-door labor and inside jokes.

Doll is out of the picture by the time Lila arrives in Gilead, but her memory and influence remain in the forefront of Lila's mind, in the form of mantras and rules for living: *Can't trust nobody. Don't stay nowhere too long. Churches just want your money. Might as well take pleasure where you can.* These are the commandments and proverbs that provide a semblance of structure and guidance for this unchurched nomad.

Suddenly Lila is no longer just the stoic godsend we met in *Gilead*. She is a loyal gardener, skilled drifter, lousy prostitute, and, eventually, ambivalent wife.

Lila is an outsider in every way: an existentially curious agnostic in a town with more

churches than grocery stores and a rootless orphan moving into a house where the same family has lived for generations. Robinson skillfully uses Lila's outsider status to voice the questions, big and small, that many believers and nonbelievers alike have wondered but rarely asked:

On worship: Why sing hymns “to somebody who had lived and died like anybody”? On Sundays: “What use was there in calling a day by a certain name, or thinking of it as anything but weather?” On unbelief: “How could it be that none of it mattered?” On shooting stars: How come “some stars came unstuck and the others didn’t”? On salvation: “What happens to you if you’re lost?”

Through Lila, Robinson pushes us out of Christian complacency into a realm of holy curiosity, and we are all the better for it.

This is a woman with a “scared, wild heart” trying earnestly to understand existence. Trying to figure out why she “bothers” with it at all. Lila “had thought a thousand times about the ferociousness of things so that it might not surprise her entirely when it showed itself again.” She wants life, even as she expects the worst. And when it comes to moving in with her “beautiful old man” of a husband, she just doesn't know what to expect. After all, “she had never been at home in all the years of her life.”

Ames never expected a woman to come and save him from the loneliness with which he'd become familiar, even friendly. And Ames, in his own patient preacher kind of way, either saves or steals Lila from a dangerous, transient life. Probably both.

There is something to learn from the wildness of life—and from the tamedness of home. Rev. Ames and Lila have much to offer to each other and to readers:

“There’s a lot I haven’t figured out. Pretty well everything.”

“He took her hand and swung it as they walked, a happy man. ‘I feel exactly the same way. I really do. So this should be very interesting.’”

Very interesting indeed. Robinson always finds a way to make theology accessible and beautiful. In *Lila*, she makes it romantic as well. ■

Jenna Barnett is an editorial assistant at Sojourners.

Robinson pushes us out of Christian complacency into a realm of holy curiosity, and we are all the better for it.

Anastasia Uglova

Bio: Anastasia Uglova is vice president at the Akilah Institute for Women in Rwanda and Burundi.

Website: www.akilahinstitute.org

1 How would you describe Akilah Institute's goals for its students and alumnae? Rwanda today is a far cry from the genocide-torn country that most think of when they hear about it. Rwandans have a vision of a knowledge-based economy, and Rwanda is fast becoming the region's leader in information technology and new business development. And yet, only 1 percent of Rwandans attend university, and just 30 percent of these are women. We want to make sure that young women have a part to play in building the country's future.

Akilah's unique model of market-relevant education empowers young women to launch professional careers and assume leadership roles when they graduate. During their three years at Akilah, students develop English fluency, leadership, public speaking, and critical-thinking skills.

2 Why does Akilah feel young women specifically have needs that must be met through education? Akilah's nurturing environment creates a culture of community where students can heal from some of the trauma of their past, and no one

struggles alone. Of the overwhelming majority of young women in Rwanda and Burundi, an estimated 95 percent will never enter the workforce. Ultimately, we hope that empowering these young women to take control of their future pays dividends generations down the line. Educated women tend to marry later in life, have healthier and fewer children, and are able to disrupt the cycle of poverty for themselves and their families.

3 What makes Akilah unique in the education it offers women?

We admit only the most promising young women. But our admissions process is unique in that we don't just look at academics. We are much more interested in fit, potential, and passion. What's special about Akilah is that it is extremely career-focused, assessing students' career interests and rigorously preparing them to find meaningful employment and launch their own businesses.

In both Rwanda and Burundi, Akilah helps to address the gaps between skills and employers' needs by tailoring diplomas to align with the industries with the highest potential for growth: information systems,



Akilah Institute for Women

entrepreneurship, and hospitality management.

4 Akilah is currently in a campaign to raise money in celebration of its five years. What are the plans and hopes moving forward? In just five years we have graduated 95 students and opened two campuses. Looking ahead, we plan to graduate 1,000 students by the year 2020. In the next two years, we also hope to open a third campus, which will allow us to build future generations of women leaders and professionals in East Africa.

Our 90 percent job-placement rate has been an important measure of our success. We could not achieve this without our employment partners, who have been working with our students through internships, employing our alumnae, and providing invaluable curriculum feedback. Likewise, our most significant supporters are those who invest in and support our amazing students, such as our partners in the Rwandan and Burundi government who have been very welcoming and supportive.

—Interview by Lani Prunés

Reine, far right, an entrepreneurship student at Akilah's Burundi campus, has wanted to open and run her own business since primary school. Reine will graduate in 2016 and hopes to work at a bank to get some customer service experience before launching her own company.



Lent's Lonely Road

ONE OF THE UNANTICIPATED effects of our health-care technologies is that we expect to live relatively pain-free lives, physically speaking. In the West, we do not imagine a physician saying to us “this *will* hurt” before cutting in. We expect to be anesthetized to avoid pain. In the same way we struggle with a biblical pathway to God, like Lent.

In Lent, we put ourselves on a lonely road with Jesus—40 days in the wilderness, struggling with hunger, thirst, loneliness, doubt, fear. In Lent, we put ourselves in a 40-year journey in the wilderness with the people Israel, wondering when, if ever, God will make good on the promises of a land flowing with milk and honey. In Lent, we do business with repentance.

Whatever else the church may say about repentance, we certainly say, “This *will* hurt. And not just a little.” Repentance means “turning around.” It also means dying, biblically speaking. We are drowned in baptism and raised to new life; we go to extremes in the wild until an entire generation dies off (the exodus) and until we are reduced to one searing set of emotions (the crucifixion). Jesus’ cross wasn’t light. Why should we expect ours to be?

Then there’s the good news. A resurrection is on the far side of that cross. Its blinding light pours around the edges of the stone rolled before the tomb. Resurrection is not in Lent, but it’s coming. In the meantime, in the words of John the Baptist, “Prepare the way.”



Jason Byassee is pastor of Boone United Methodist Church in Boone, N.C., and a fellow in theology and leadership at Duke Divinity School.

God can do great work with our worst.

[MARCH 1]

Now and Not Yet

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22:23-31; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 9:2-9

IT'S ONLY THE second Sunday of Lent and resurrection already peaks around the edges of our texts. The God who always works wonders promises to bless Abram and Sarai, to make royalty come from them, to be God for them unendingly. What’s cut out from these verses is what God wants to cut off from Abram. I imagine Abram responding, “You want to cut my *what*?” Israel will be a people peculiarly marked.

And not only Israel. Psalm 22 describes a man brutalized to death, informing the gospel writers’ depiction of Jesus’ crucifixion. The psalmist shifts from lament to worldwide global praise. We glimpse the church, born through the man of sorrows, drawn from all nations, where “the poor eat and [are] satisfied” (verse 26). Romans 4 makes the same move, describing blessing offered *through* Israel to the whole world. Paul takes circumcision and makes it a sign of the faithfulness of the God of all.

“Six days later,” Mark 9 begins, signaling the days of creation before the Sabbath; an incompleteness that’s a tragic day short of the Sabbath banquet. “Eight days after these things,” Luke 9 opens the same story. Christians have historically understood the eighth day of creation to be Easter. In that transfigured reality all the saints are present, Jesus is host, and all things reflect his light.

[MARCH 8]

Submit to the Law?

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19;
1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

POPULAR CONCEPTIONS of the Ten Commandments would not include the psalmist’s description of “delight.” “Thou shalt not” thunders and we shudder. But the psalmist exults. The poetry shines through

in translation: “The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether” (19:8-9).

One sign that we don’t typically delight in the Decalogue is how few commandments we know by heart. Famous surveys of ordained ministers suggest we can remember maybe six of them, at most. Our loss. C.S. Lewis commented that our entire economy in the West is built on violation of the 10th commandment against coveting—where would advertisers be if anyone followed it?

What sort of foolish God gives commands, sees the people disobey, and then forgives? The same sort of weak and foolish God who would take flesh, suffer, and die for those same creatures. The same sort who would enter the temple and turn over the sources of income. Scholars think this event likely happened at the end of Jesus’ life. John has moved it to the beginning, book-ending Jesus’ career with the demonstration in the temple. This lawgiver submits to the law and will die trying to get us to share his delight in it.

[MARCH 15]

Handling Snakes

Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22;
Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

SOMETIMES, WHEN God’s people murmur and complain, God responds with patience and grace. Sometimes, not (“Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people,” Numbers 21:6). The death-dealing serpent returns.

This sits ill with most modern Christians’ notion of the gospel. Our boilerplate gospel is too thin. Scripture doesn’t preach “I’m ok, you’re ok” pablum. It preaches that, left to our own devices, we are totally sunk.

But we are not left to our own devices. God’s word resurrects as the psalmist reminds us: “God sent out the word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction” (Psalm 107:20). Ephesians is perhaps one of the most singularly clear notes of grace in the symphony of scripture: “By grace you have been saved through faith” (2:8). When we had no reason to

expect life, when the dirt is on the grave and we are dead gone, *then*, God's resurrecting word works.

Jesus compares himself to, of all things, the snake in the wilderness. Jesus becomes an object of horror, an image of death-dealing, a source of derision. This becomes life for the world.

"Fear teaches you what you must do," a wise person said. Jesus, God among us, meets the worst form of death at our hands, then returns to us with grace and forgiveness. This is spectacularly good news for those who despair the future of the planet. The worst may come. Yet God can do great work with our worst.

[MARCH 22]

Delight Is Contagious

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 119:9-16;
Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

HOW DO WE HUMAN beings learn anything? For St. Augustine, what teaches best is *the desire of the teacher*. He must have taken cues from Psalm 119, a lyric poem in praise of God's law that uses verbs such as "delight" and "treasure." Delight is contagious—we catch it by noticing what others whom we admire delight in. The monks at

Jesus' cross wasn't light. Why should we expect ours to be?

the monastery I visit chant pieces of Psalm 119 *every day*. They want to catch delight in God's law.

We can also learn through suffering. Hebrews has the highest Christology of any New Testament book. Yet it clearly portrays Jesus as learning obedience through what he suffers. Apparently being fully God doesn't mean you can't learn. In fact godliness and learning may be twins.

We can learn by being turned away. In John, some Greeks want to see Jesus (plaques used to adorn pulpits quoting their request). He ignores them. It's not yet their time. God can say no to us. There may be a yes hidden in the no. But it can hurt first.

And we can learn by *not learning*. Jeremiah's promise is that we will no longer have to teach and learn, but all will know the Lord.

Christians too often use the law as a foil for grace, as if it were a wicked gift of a malicious God. Scripture is richer than that. We are to delight in it, as Jesus does.

[MARCH 29]

Cosmic Consequences

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16;
Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14:1-15:47

IT IS STAGGERING to me that we still have Christians who believe "bad things" are God's curse and "good things" are God's blessings. Have they *read* the Bible?

Wait, have I? Unless I stop to think, I too reduce God to what God can do for me. Jesus' cross shows things turned the other way around. The more faithful we are, the worse it may go for us. Why do bad things happen to good people? I don't know, no one does, but the worst thing happened to the best person.

Scripture is not scandalized by that. Isaiah reminds us of the person of many sorrows, acquainted with grief. Philippians shows the cosmic consequences at stake. The Word is in the very nature of God, leaving equality with God, coming among us, and dying a slave's death. Then the Word ascends, taking the name above every name, that all will one day worship. When Jesus descends from above to the depths below and back, he leaves a staircase assembled for us.

His own life shows the way. His passion is a descent, from being denied, betrayed, arrested, tried, denied again, sentenced, tortured, crucified, killed, and buried. On Passion Sunday and Good Friday, it is good to leave Jesus dead. There will be more than enough celebration soon enough. For now, no one can be so crushed as to be unable to look over and not see that there lies the man of Galilee. ■

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

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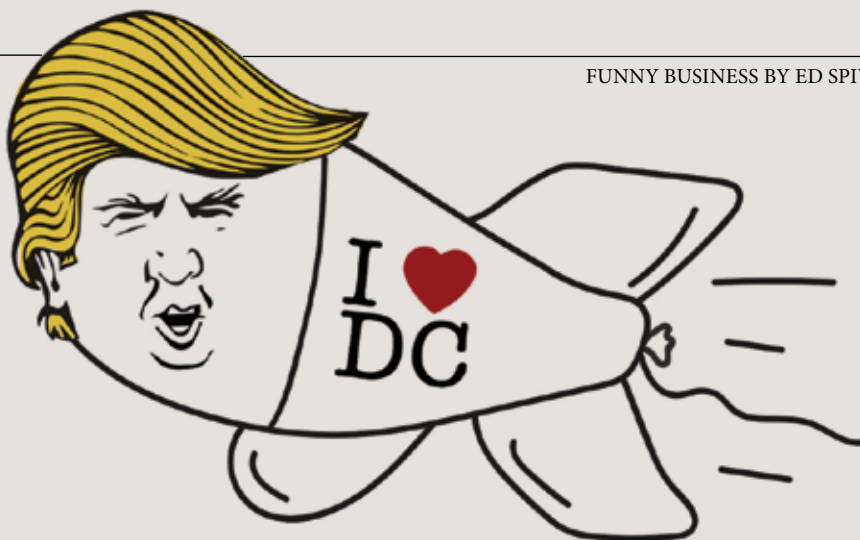


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Like Giant Marshmallows on a String

IF YOU'RE TRAVELING by air to Washington, D.C., this winter, be sure to look out your window. You don't want to miss the lovely patchwork of monuments that covers the city, or the scenic curves of the Potomac River, or the giant dolphin-shaped balloons within arms-reach of your seat in coach. But don't try to pet them. Setting aside the problem of rapid decompression if you open a window, the balloons are property

Another great idea from our patriotic defense contractors.

of the U.S. Army, and they don't like people touching their stuff.

The balloons—I call them balloons, although they're actually reconnaissance blimps designed to warn against hostile missiles—float about 10,000 feet above the ground, tethered by inch-wide cables, presumably not held on the other end by children at, say, the zoo. Each blimp looks like a huge white dolphin with an unfortunate—and apparently undiagnosed—abdominal growth protruding from its belly. Clearly, it's something a qualified medical professional should look at. Of course, if it's just a navel, there's no problem. But it's definitely an outie.

There are two of these blimps, each 243 feet long and weighing, well, nothing, because they're filled with helium, the gas that would have

been used in the Hindenburg had the construction crews been smokers. (Smokers may not be smart, but they're fast learners.) The blimps float above the Aberdeen Proving Grounds, just outside D.C., in some of the busiest airspace on the East Coast, and trail about two miles of cable connected to the ground. What could possibly go wrong?

THE DEVICES are called—and this is why there are no stutterers in the military—the Joint Land Attack Cruise Missile Defense Elevated Netted Sensor System (JLENS, if you want to tweet it). They're made by Raytheon, another selfless member of the military-industrial complex, which believes we are in constant danger from countless evil forces that can only be deterred by their products. *Thank God they're on our side!* It's all top secret, of course, so don't ask. They could tell you, but then they'd have to charge you.

To you cynics out there, these blimps are not, as Army public relations officers are quick to point out, for keeping an eye on people on the ground. They say this with a completely straight face. There are no cameras or recording devices on board, they claim, just secret other stuff that can detect incoming missiles, although incoming from where was not revealed. (I'm guessing New Jersey.)

But it begs the questions: Are

there Russian or Chinese submarines off the coast of Atlantic City? Does ISIS have intercontinental attack capability? If so, should these blimps be scarier looking than giant animal-shaped pillows from a child's bedroom? Could they at least have frightening faces, like one of those monsters from *Lord of the Rings*, or maybe Donald Trump? (Heat-seeking missiles would detect no warmth, so they might turn back.)

In terms of public safety, the Army assures us these blimps can resist winds of more than 100 miles per hour, although I'm thinking if it's that windy, they would stretch out and lean over like a beach kite that knocks over somebody's cooler, or gets tangled in a pick-up football game. And then muscular young men come over and yell at you.

"Hey, buddy. Is that your blimp?"

"Actually, it belongs to the U.S. Army, and it's made [pause for patriotic effect] by Raytheon."

"Well, you're going to have to pay for that cooler. There was beer in there, which we drink to help forget about the constant danger from countless evil forces."

"Where'd you hear about those?"

"From Raytheon. We're friends on Facebook."

Thumbs up for Raytheon. And fingers crossed. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Ken Davis

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